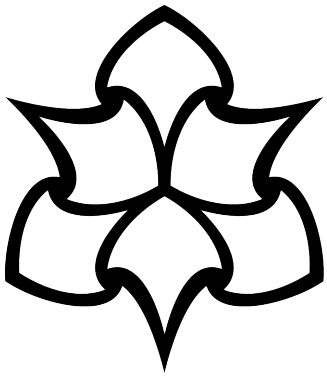

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE: ELECTORAL POLITICS AND POLITICAL CHANGE IN MANCHESTER AND STOKE-ON-TRENT, 1906-1922

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The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Alliance: Electoral Politics and Political Change in Manchester and Stoke-on Trent, 1906-1922

This dissertation explores electoral politics in two of Britain's important industrial localities between 1906 and 1922, a period which witnessed unprecedented political change. The study focuses particular attention on the politics of the Progressive Alliance and explores the character, development and difficulties of progressive co-operation in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent before the outbreak of the First World War and examines the consequences of its collapse afterwards. The study provides detailed analysis of election campaigns before and immediately after the First World War, assessing the influence of ideology, the role of candidates and political mobilisation and shows how local political activists were of central importance within the political process and consequent outcomes. The study supports the view that the British Liberal Party appeared strong before the outbreak of war and suggests that a Labour breakthrough appeared unlikely in the foreseeable future. The study shows that popular working-class Liberalism in Stoke-on-Trent remained strong and traditional political loyalties retained considerable purchase. In Manchester political support had become more spatial; party strength was concentrated in specific parts of the city and the fledgling Labour Party made only tentative progress in the years prior to 1914. Analysis of Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent demonstrates that the Edwardian political system was to a considerable extent dependent upon the continuation of the Progressive Alliance yet the long-term viability of alliance between the two left-of-centre parties is questioned. The study concludes that reasons for the decline of the Liberal Party and subsequent rise of Labour were intrinsically related to the experience of the First World War. The political situation and ideology were of central importance to the reconfiguration of party politics in Britain from 1918. Political events aided the Labour Party's expansion at the expense of a weakened Liberal Party but this does not mean that political allegiances were simply constructed from above. The Labour Party had to consolidate its position on the basis of its policy appeal and as this study shows it did so particularly effectively from 1918. A principal objective of this study is to refocus attention on what has often been a major omission in the study of the historical development of electoral politics during the early twentieth century: the power of politics within the electoral process.

Acknowledgements

Many people, in one way or another have contributed to this study. I would sincerely like to thank my director of studies, Dr. Tony Adams, who has provided considerable support, encouragement and patience throughout its development. He has sharpened my understanding of the subject and polished my writing; I am eternally grateful to him. I should like to thank Professor Peter Barberis and Dr. James Moore for their academic advice and more particularly for their long-term friendship. I would like to express my gratitude to the late Professor Duncan Tanner who provided considerable encouragement in the early stages of the study. It is with considerable sadness that he was never able to see the completed work. I would like to thank my colleagues within the Department of Politics and Philosophy at the Manchester Metropolitan University for all their support over the last few years; in particular I would like to thank Dr. John Gibbons, Dr. Steve Hurst, Dr. Janet Mather and Dr. Mike Tyldesley. I would like to express my gratitude to the Research Degrees Committee in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science at Manchester Metropolitan University for their patience and for allowing me to complete the study after my appointment as a lecturer in the Department of Politics and Philosophy limited scope for an immediate completion. I would also like to thank Laura Gyergyai, Mustafa Cirakli and Bob Glass for their support and practical contributions. On a personal note I should like to thank my grandmother for her support and I hope she finds what follows an interesting insight into a place she knows well. I owe more to my husband Julian than I could possibly express; his unflinching support and practical contributions are truly appreciated. Finally, I would like to put on record my immense admiration of many of the political activists discussed within the present study; their drive and determination to create a more progressive society was remarkable and some of them stood by their convictions when circumstances were by no means favourable to them. Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my mother, Kathleen Frost.

Contents

Chapter 1: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Alliance: Electoral Politics and Political Change in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent, 1906-1922: Introduction

The Decline of the Liberal Party Debate

The collapse of the Liberal Party after 1918 and the subsequent advance of Labour remains one of the most important events in modern British political history. Few subjects have attracted more attention, nor indeed debate.[1] Such fascination is understandable not least because the scale and speed of Liberal collapse was so dramatic. The turn of the twentieth century had seen the Liberal Party reinvent itself; the party's organisation had been overhauled on Herbert Gladstone's initiative and ideologically the period witnessed the emergence of profound Liberal radicalism and the doctrine which become known as 'New Liberalism'. These two aspects were interconnected in that throughout the process of reorganisation the party sought to focus on the democratisation of its selection policy. New candidates were younger and tended to be more radical than their predecessors. It is possibly true to suggest that the early twentieth century saw the modernisation of British Liberalism.

At the same time Britain saw the appearance of a new political movement. The impact of the formation of the Labour Representation Committee on British politics was immense. Few could have predicted, however, that just over two decades later this organisation would be in a position to form its first, albeit minority, government. During the 1900s both parties of the left, although maintaining their own strict independence, sought to advance their electoral position by way of a policy of co-operation with each other; the policy that became known as the Progressive Alliance. Although the exact extent of its acceptance within both parties may be questioned on the eve of war the Progressive Alliance remained more or less intact. More importantly, it seemed unlikely there might be an imminent (and overwhelming) restructuring of the political system, a significant 'rise' of Labour at the expense of the Liberal Party. On the contrary, the Liberal Party appeared to be comfortably sustaining its position as a major electoral force. The 1906 general election had seen the Liberal Party returned to office with one of the most significant victories of

[1] For a straightforward overview of the historiography in relation to the decline of the Liberal Party and rise of Labour (up to 1995) see K. Laybourn, 'The Rise of Labour and the Decline of Liberalism: The State of the Debate', *History*, 80 (1995).

modern times; 400 seats and a majority of a 130. Similarly, the Labour Representation Committee could also afford to be satisfied after securing forty members in the new parliament. By 1924 the respective figures were 40 and nearly 200 of the foregoing. It needs little reiteration therefore that after 1918 the collapse of the Liberals to the status of a third party was swift and unrelenting. One contemporary observer after the 1918 general election went so far as to describe the new political situation for the Liberal Party as a 'holocaust'.[2] Nearly a century later, entirely satisfactory explanations for the 'decline' of the Liberal Party and rise of Labour remain elusive.

The first major work examining the post-First World War fortunes of the Liberal Party appeared remarkably close to the time of the transformation itself; George Dangerfield's *The Strange Death of Liberal England'* (published in 1936) set the tone of interpretation for the next three decades.[3] Dangerfield's main contention was that the decline of the Liberal Party was a reflection of the wider collapse of Liberal political culture and he suggested that it was connected to specific difficulties during the pre-war period. After 1906 the Liberal Government had been confronted with an array of disaffected groupings and political problems; trade unionists, the House of Lords, suffragettes, Tariff Reform and the Irish Question to name just a few. In embarking upon the radical course that it had the Liberal Government (and party) managed to alienate itself from substantial sections of public opinion; all these factors undermined the party's energy and strength. Furthermore, there was the question of the emergence of the Labour Party with its demand for increased independent labour representation. By 1914, for Dangerfield, British Liberalism was defunct because it simply could not cope anymore. Implicit in Dangerfield's assessment, therefore, was a degree of inevitability about the 'death' of Liberal England. Effectively, his overall conclusion was that, in fact, it was not strange at all, it was easily explainable. *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (which remains in print today) was a pioneering work of its age. Whilst modern historians are generally sceptical about Dangerfield's array of events and the effects these had upon political change[4] (in particular the extent to which the Liberals were completely unable to cope with the problems they encountered) *The Strange Death of Liberal England* remains an important part of the

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[2] *The Times,* 30th December 1918.
[3] G. Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London, 1936).
[4] See for example, D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918* (Cambridge, 1990).

historiography on Edwardian England. Dangerfield successfully identified four great crises omnipresent within Edwardian politics and society: amongst workers, women, the aristocracy and in connection to the Irish Question. In his view, these 'problems' overwhelmed not just Edwardian Liberalism but the 'assumptions' of 'Liberal England' and (equally) he recognised that the Labour Party was as much a part of this culture and, indeed, just as much at sea in many ways as the Liberals themselves. Of course, Dangerfield's interpretation of Edwardian politics generated significant debate and in a sense the importance of *The Strange Death of Liberal England* lies not necessarily in the strength of its own specific argument but rather in relation to the historical debate it helped to foster.

Interest in the decline of the Liberal Party was heightened from the 1960s. The period coincided with the emergence of social history alongside a greater predominance of left-inclined historians. Many of the new generation of historians became interested in debates surrounding the development of class-consciousness during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which, of course, overlapped with the period of Liberal resurgence followed by decline. It was not surprising, therefore, that some historians began to focus attention on the transformation of the political parties during this period. The 'rise of Labour' approach was appealing for some historians because that party's 'onward march' could be presented as a victory of the working-classes against a backdrop of elite intransigence with respect to their political rights.[5]

Left-leaning historians and their perceptions of class consciousness, politicisation and political mobilisation became hugely influential in the debate surrounding the decline of the Liberal Party.[6] For them, it was important to highlight examples of independent working-class action which would ultimately destroy the existing order. The collapse of the Liberal Party could be used as a case in point. Some historians suggested that even before the Home Rule crisis many nonconformists were beginning to move away

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[5] For a summary of the debate on class politics and the Liberal Party see G. Searle, *The Liberal Party, Triumph and Disintegration 1886-1929* (London, 1992), pp. 55-9. Generally speaking, most recent studies have recognised the complexity of class and have rejected the supposed homogeneity of the British working class.

[6] Some of the most prominent exponents of the inevitable rise of Labour school include K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour, 1890-1918*, (London, 1984); P. Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour*, (London, 1967); A. Howkins, 'Edwardian Liberalism and Industrial Unrest', *History Workshop Journal* (1977).

from the Liberals but this became an even more pronounced feature after the party had embarked upon an attempt to court the working-class vote more directly.[7] Alongside this, by the last quarter of the nineteenth century the middle-classes also had noticeably higher aspirations. These factors contributed, therefore, to a drift towards the Conservatives placing the Liberals in an increasing difficult dilemma.[8] The subject of the development of class consciousness and its impact on political development has been controversial and more recently historians have tended to move away from perceiving class as the major determinant of political behaviour. [9]

The publication of Ross McKibbin's *Evolution of the Labour Party*[10] in 1974 represented a significant turning-point in the historiography of the Labour Party and it served to ignite considerable debate on Liberal and Labour politics before the outbreak of the First World War. McKibbin's work suggested that the seeds of future Labour growth were already in place as 1914 approached. Labour's 'rise' was assured for a number of reasons including the growth of an acute sense of working-class 'class consciousness,' trade union expansion and (eventually) extension of the franchise. Other factors such as better party organisation, continuity of personnel and appeal of policy also served to underpin Labour's 'natural' and 'inevitable' expansion; as McKibbin concluded 'everything pointed to Labour's enduring Ante-bellum character'.[11] For McKibbin, what limited Labour's expansion during the early twentieth century was the parliamentary franchise as this blocked an immediate advance because the party's 'natural' constituency was effectively (or actually) disenfranchised. McKibbin's core argument was that war acted as an accelerator of an already established process; it was not the sole instigator of the political transformation that occurred afterwards. The implication of McKibbin's thesis,

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[7] See H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (London, 1969).
[8] Ibid, pp. 431-5.
[9] See, for example, D. Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (Yale, 1998), pp. 8-12; J. Lawrence, 'Popular Radicalism and the Socialist Revival in Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), pp. 168-86. Even those who still perceive class to be a significant aspect of social and political change recognise it is a highly complex phenomenon; see J. Thompson, 'After the Fall: Class and Political Language in Britain, 1700-1900', *Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), pp. 785-806. Furthermore, of course, there is the possibility that experience of class injustice and the development of class consciousness can be mitigated by the process of political, economic or social inclusion; see R. McKibbin, 'Why was there no Marxism in Great Britain?' in *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1959* (Oxford, 1990). It has been suggested a disproportionate focus on class has resulted in the relative neglect of other identities, see P. Joyce, *Visions of the People, Industrial England and the Question of Class 1848-1914* (Cambridge, 1991).
[10] R. McKibbin, *Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924* (Oxford, 1974).
[11] R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, p. 240.

therefore, was that throughout the decade following its formation, the Labour Party existed as a 'sleeping monster on the political landscape'. In collaboration with Matthew and Kay, McKibbin argued even more explicitly that had there been a wider franchise the decline of the Liberal Party would have happened even more quickly.[12] Historians such as Pelling, McKibbin and Laybourn also argued that developments in municipal politics before the outbreak of war equally suggest that Liberal support amongst the working-classes was beginning to ebb away and this was connected principally to the emergence of a new class-based politics. Historians such as Laybourn questioned the extent to which New Liberalism had permeated all areas.[13] In his study of the West Riding Laybourn concluded that New Liberalism never managed to become a powerful force, on the contrary, the Liberals remained 'aggressive' and 'unwilling to compromise.'[14] In his examination of Leicester, Lancaster also contended that New Liberalism had failed to stem the tide of an ascendant Labour Party and he even went so far as to suggest that the victory of Ramsay MacDonald in 1906 heralded 'the beginning of the end for the Liberal Party' in Leicester as a result of an acute class-based politics.[15]

McKibbin has since modified his position quite dramatically, recently stating, for example, he now believes his earlier interpretation 'inadequately represents the reality of Edwardian politics' and he has stated how he no longer considers 'the Edwardian system as already disintegrating'.[16] McKibbin's view now is essentially that the Edwardian political system was based upon an 'equipoise in balance' although, critically, it was one 'delicate enough for it to be severely unbalanced by events' which began in 1914.[17]

During the late 1960s and early 1970s a number of historians began to argue that structural and class-based interpretations of the collapse of the Liberal Party severely

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[12] H. Matthew, R. McKibbin and J. A. Kay, 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party', *English Historical Review,* 91 (1976).
[13] See also, D. Powell, 'The New Liberalism and the Rise of Labour, 1886-1906', *Historical Journal*, 29 (1986).
[14] See K. Laybourn, *The Rise of Labour: The British Labour Party 1890-1979* (London, 1988), p27.
[15] See B. Lancaster, *Radicalism, Co-operation and Socialism: Leicester Working Class Politics 1860-1906*, (Leicester, 1987), p. 22.
[16] R. McKibbin, *Parties and People: England 1914-1951,* (Oxford, 2010).
[17] For McKibbin's full exploration of his position today see ibid pp. 1-32. This will be discussed more fully later within the present study.

exaggerated Liberal disintegration before the outbreak of the First World War. They contended that the Liberals, in fact, remained incredibly robust in most respects; ideology, organisation and electoral appeal. If the Liberals had passed through troubled times (primarily as a result of the Home Rule crisis) the party's electoral victories from 1906 confirmed that it had fully recovered. In *Downfall of the Liberal Party* (1968) Trevor Wilson argued that it was only war itself that 'initiated a process of disintegration' within the Liberal Party which by 1918 had 'reduced it to ruins'.[18] Wilson accepted that before 1914 the Liberal administrations encountered significant difficulties (Ireland, the constitutional crisis and industrial unrest, in particular) but if these aspects represented 'problems' it was no reason to believe that the Liberal Party might soon be out of office; they did not mean the party itself was doomed to near extinction. [19] In a famous analogy Wilson likened the Liberals as being akin to 'a sick man run over by a rampant omnibus'[20] although the sickness had been non life-threatening and suggestions to the contrary were wildly exaggerated. In 1971 Roy Douglas's *The History of the Liberal Party* supported Wilson's proposition that the Liberal Party had remained strong before the outbreak of war.[21] Douglas claimed that what shattered the Liberal Party most of all was a series of accidental factors which had arisen both during and after the war. So both Wilson and Douglas contended that the Liberals (essentially) were in good shape before 1914 and in no sense in an apparent state of 'decline'. Douglas went even further by suggesting that if any party was in a state of decline before 1914 it was, in fact, the Labour Party. Both of these studies revolutionised historical analysis of the decline of the Liberal Party.[22]

Another influential work appeared in 1971 with Peter Clarke's *Lancashire and the New Liberalism.*[23] Clarke appeared to be an even stronger advocate of pre-war Liberal strength and his detailed examination of Lancashire contended that the Liberal Party had become *the* most powerful medium for political change. Clarke argued that the Liberal Party possessed substantial electoral appeal based upon traditional principles such as Free Trade and individualism whilst incorporating a new, more reformist and

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[18] T. Wilson, *Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914-1935* (London, 1966) p. 23.
[19] Ibid, p.16.
[20] Ibid, p.18.
[21] R. Douglas, *History of the Liberal Party* (London, 1971).
[22] See R. Douglas, 'Labour in Decline, 1910-1914', in K. D. Brown, (ed) *Essays in Anti-Labour History*, (London, 1974).
[23] P. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971).

collectivist ideology most clearly expressed within what had become known as 'New Liberalism'. In short, Liberalism entered the twentieth century re-energised and attentive to the needs of a mass electorate and it was unwise to perceive that the Liberals were unduly challenged by the fledgling Labour Party or that the arrival of Labour would inevitably be detrimental to the party's long-term prospects. On the contrary, Clarke's analysis suggested that the Labour Party was, in fact, fading before the appeal of the 'New Liberalism'. In essence, Clarke's argument appeared to suggest that before 1914 the Liberals had successfully 'out-trumped' Labour. Such an evaluation of Edwardian politics represented a radically different interpretation to that which had been presented by the Labour historians.

Paul Thompson's study of London (which had been published four years earlier), however, appeared to suggest that the position of the Liberal Party in the capital was less secure. Thompson demonstrated how there had been an apparent (and sharp) decline in the fortunes of the Liberals in London after 1892.[24] Factors such as the lack of a viable working-class electoral base, organisational and financial problems all contributed to this Liberal malaise. He also made the (not insignificant claim) that the early twentieth century Liberal revival was to the greater extent issue- based and once these issues began to lose their political effect so too would the Liberals' position become increasingly fragile. Thompson claimed that the Liberal Party had not reinvented itself as a 'classless party of reform'; it was in reality specific issues such as Free Trade, education, trade union grievances and Home Rule which helped the party pick up the Nonconformist, trade union and Irish vote in 1906 and thereafter the Liberals were 'held together by success'. Thompson's conclusion was that the post 1906 Liberal revival was a 'deceptive illusion' because, as he contended; behind the apparent electoral success, the party itself was 'rotting at its roots'.[25]

More recent studies of political change during the early decades of the twentieth century have contributed enormously to our understanding. Most notably, Duncan Tanner's *Political Change and the Labour Party* (1990) provided an exhaustively-researched examination of Liberal and Labour politics during this critical period in British history. Tanner concluded that political change was extremely fragmented and

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[24] P. Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour: The Struggle for London, 1885-1914* (London, 1967).
[25] Ibid, p. 10 and pp. 167-189.

complex as was social and economic change. He illustrated how early twentieth century Liberalism was a broad reforming coalition and there were few signs before the outbreak of war that the party was in a state of 'decline' although there were problems connected with this composite nature since it meant that it could not easily adopt radical measures.[26] It would not always be so easy to maintain unity within a party which (in many ways) possessed contradictory views. A key point of Tanner's work therefore was that the split during the First World War had proved fatal because existing problems had become more serious. Moreover, for Tanner, the rise of Labour could not adequately be explained by reference to an increasing working-class consciousness (and similar propositions) because the Labour Party itself was a practical party with a practical programme; it was progressive and reformist (in exactly the same way as the Liberal Party was). After 1918 the Labour Party inherited the vacuum left by the collapse of the Liberals because it was not so dissimilar to that party.

Tanner's study represented a major turning point in the historiography of early twentieth century British party politics because it demonstrated the complexities of political culture and electoral re-alignment and illustrated how neat and simple explanations might prove unhelpful. Tanner's analysis, based upon a number of detailed regional studies, also demonstrated how fragmented political developments were during the early twentieth century; political change was highly regionalised. There was no uniform experience across the whole of the country and consequently earlier studies of the decline of the Liberal Party and rise of Labour had been problematic because their scope had been too wide or at least it could be suggested their focus had been too exclusively based upon national politics and so had not appreciated the significant extent of regional variation.

The Local Study

Study of the development of local politics is central to a more contextualised understanding of the respective positions of the parties especially during the early twentieth century. Recent years have seen an increase in the number of detailed local studies which have served to confirm Tanner's view that there was no uniform

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[26] D. Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 431.

experience. Savage has raised a number of critical points in relation to the local study.[27] The use of the local study as simply 'illustrative' has serious drawbacks; it can make the central argument weak because the locality has been used simply in order to prove a point. Thus, prior conceptions of an eventual conclusion tend to produce a highly selective approach. Yet, if approached carefully, as Savage suggests the detailed local study can prevent an overly determinist account of political change which presents party performance as essentially the product of changing social and economic circumstances and national development. The local study is also useful in order to prevent an overly autonomous reading of politics where political change is perceived to be in consequence of autonomous processes, such as the impact of national political leadership. The health of local organisations has to be seen as a critical factor in contextualising the debate concerning the national strength (or otherwise) of political parties. Furthermore, it is essential to appreciate from the outset the sheer extent to which local politics touched people's everyday lives during the early twentieth century. To use Savage's apt expression '*the local* was the bedrock of political life'.[28] Indeed, Savage's own detailed study of the 'dynamics of working-class politics' in Preston successfully stresses the importance of the local dimension. In fact this study suggests that political development in Preston remained almost exclusively influenced by local factors right up to 1939.[29]

The local study helps give us a more thorough understanding of the period under consideration, not least, because it allows us to examine popular responses to policy in microscopic detail and to assess the changing character of the political parties themselves by evaluating aspects such as the character of candidates, changes in ideological approach as well as developments at the municipal level. Given that much of the activity of the early Labour movement focused attention upon local government it seems especially appropriate to assess in some detail Labour's role and influence in municipal politics. Although there has been a proliferation in local studies of political change during the early twentieth century, there have been relatively few studies

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[27] See M. Savage, 'The Rise of Labour in Local Perspective', *Journal of the of Local and Regional Studies*, 10 (1990), p.12 and 'Political Alignments in Modern Britain: Do Localities Matter?' *Political Geography Quarterly*, 6, (1987), pp. 53-76.
[28] Ibid, p. 7.
[29] Ibid, p.187.

providing detailed comparative examination of a number of localities. [30] Yet, there are many advantages of detailed comparative analysis. Like the local study, comparative historical analysis needs to be approached carefully; simplistic comparisons between areas might not, in fact, prove very much at all.

Geographical Context: Studies of Local and Regional Politics

A number of local studies have suggested that previous interpretations of political change in the early twentieth century had significantly overestimated the extent to which the Labour Party had made progress by 1914. In the localities they evaluated Pugh, Purdue and Adams, for example, concluded that the Labour Party's progress was extremely limited prior to 1914.[31] Others, however, including Thompson, Hill, Laybourn and Lancaster have claimed that Labour had made identifiable progress in the areas they assessed. One of the key features of Edwardian politics, however, was its local variety; voters remained responsive to local issues as much as they did to national questions. Nonetheless, examination of politics at the constituency level provides an invaluable insight into how the political parties responded to the challenges they faced and, equally important, how voters reacted to the issues with which they were presented.

A number of historians have made valuable contributions to our understanding of political change during the years before 1914 by detailed examination of Liberal and Labour politics in various localities across Britain. As highlighted above, some have supported Clarke's analysis that the Liberal Party was gaining ground in working class communities before 1914. In his study of the North East of England, Purdue concluded that after 1906 the area remained dominated by the Liberal Party and,

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[30] Exceptions include T. Adams, 'Labour and the First World War: Economy, Politics and the Decline of Local Peculiarity', *Journal of Local Studies* (Summer, 1990); G. Bernstein, 'Liberalism and the Progressive Alliance in the Constituencies 1900-1914: Three Case Studies', *Historical Journal*, 26, (1983), pp. 617-640; S. Davies and B. Morley, 'The Politics of Place: A Comparative Analysis of Electoral Politics in Blackburn, Bolton, Burnley and Bury', *Manchester Region History* Review, 14, 2000; M. Dawson, 'Liberalism in Devon and Cornwall, 1910-1931: The Old Time Religion', *Historical Journal,* 38 (1995), pp 425-437; J. Moore, *The Transformation of Urban Liberalism,* (Aldershot, 2006) and P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914* (Oxford, 1987).

[31] M. Pugh, 'Yorkshire and the New Liberalism', *Journal of Modern History*, Supplement, 50 (1978); A. W. Purdue, 'Liberal and Labour Politics in the North East of England: the Struggle for Supremacy', *International Review of Social History*, 11 (1981); T. Adams, 'Liberals, Labour and the First World War: Politics, Economy and the Decline of Local Peculiarity', *Journal of Local and Regional Studies* (Summer 1990).

moreover, the limited presence Labour did possess was only in consequence of Liberal acquiescence.[32] Pugh's study of Yorkshire also claimed that the Liberals remained remarkably successful (within the context of a predominantly working-class electorate); Labour's share of the popular vote never reached more than 20% and the party performed badly in the one (triangular) by-election it chose to contest.[33] More significantly, Pugh illustrated how across the West Riding mining communities as a whole, Labour never polled more than half of the miners' vote. Morgan concluded that among the Welsh mining communities, Lib-Labism there remained the 'dominant and unifying creed' and it seemed unlikely there would be a significant Labour advance in the immediate future.[34] Stead's examination of Wales supported Morgan in contending that Liberalism remained strong, although he did suggest that Labour's improving organisation and growing presence in municipal government in Wales may have laid the foundations for future development.[35] Significantly, Pugh, Purdue, Morgan and Stead agreed that relations between the two progressive parties in these particular areas were deteriorating by 1914. In Scotland, too, evidence suggests that an imminent Labour breakthrough seemed unlikely. Fraser concluded that Labour's progress north of the border (especially within the mining districts) was sluggish; the party's organisation remained weak and popular support was limited.[36] Fraser cited poor performance in a number of by-elections before 1914 as evidence to support the assertion that Labour's progress was tentative to say the least and, ultimately, Liberalism demonstrated a remarkable ability to retain its traditional support among the Scottish industrial working-classes.

Lawrence's study of popular politics in Wolverhampton before 1914 highlights the complexities of political change before the outbreak of war. Lawrence contends that there 'is little reason to believe that structural changes within the economy and society had created a new base for class politics' and he even questions the extent to which Labour saw itself as representing a 'new type of party' the basis of which was

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[32] A. W. Purdue, 'The Liberal and Labour Parties'.
[33] M. Pugh, 'Yorkshire and the New Liberalism?' *Modern History Journal*, 50, supplement (1978).
[34] K. Morgan, 'New Liberalism and the Challenge of Labour; the Welsh Experience' in K. D. Brown, *The First Labour Party 1906-1914*, (London, 1985), p. 172.
[35] P. Stead, 'Establishing a Labour Heartland' in ibid, pp. 69-72.
[36] W. Hamish Fraser, 'The Labour Party in Scotland', in ibid, pp. 52-59.

working-class solidarity.[37] In Wolverhampton, Labour had to compete with 'highly developed Liberal and Conservative appeals' to the working man and, furthermore, its activists were in fact only 'marginally more representative' than the party's opponents.[38] For Lawrence, factors retarding a wider Labour advance in the area included aspects such as the party's inability to exploit the 'politics of place' successfully because it was too constrained by co-operation with official Liberalism.[39] Lawrence's work also suggested that the Labour Party in Wolverhampton suffered an additional disadvantage in being perceived as being too reliant on 'outsiders'; this, of course, was a natural consequence of local organisational weakness.

Other studies have presented a similar picture of the problems Labour faced in constructing a distinct and viable political appeal before 1914. Davies's evaluation of the development of the Labour Party in Liverpool, for example, demonstrates the considerable difficulties the fledgling party faced when confronted with weak unionisation, a predominantly poor population and religious division.[40] His study concluded that there existed an array of factors which contributed towards the Labour Party's inability to make early progress in Liverpool. These included the impact of the electoral system (in local elections) and an inability of the Labour Party to cope with the problems it encountered. In consequence the development of Labour in Liverpool lagged behind other areas.[41]

The Progressive Alliance

Regional and national studies of Liberal and Labour politics have also illustrated the complexity of progressive co-operation. A number of historians have contended that the Progressive Alliance appeared to be on the verge of breaking down by 1914. Petter's study of the Progressive Alliance, for instance, pointed to a number of by-

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[37] See J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1860-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 266. Lawrence does determine, however, that class consciousness was highly developed by 1914. The key point, however, was that the Labour Party was ill placed to translate [this] into a new form of class-based political identity.

[38] J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, p. 266.

[39] Ibid p.267.

[40] See S. Davies, *Liverpool Labour: Social and Political Influences on the Development of the Labour Party, 1900-1939* (Keele, 1996) and 'The Liverpool Labour Party and the Liverpool Working Class, 1900-1939', *Bulletin of the North West Labour History Society*, 6 (1980).

[41] The first Labour MP was elected for a Liverpool seat at a by-election in 1923 and even by 1939 only 3 of the city's 11 divisions were held by Labour. In municipal politics Labour's record was even worse; before 1914 the party held just 7 seats on the council (of 140) and even after the war progress was sluggish; the most being 59 seats from 157, see S. Davies, *Liverpool Labour*, pp. 81-94.

elections before 1914 as evidence that the Progressive Alliance had started to break down by that point.[42] He suggested that conflict at by-elections served to undermine an already fragile alliance between the parties in the constituencies and concluded that (ultimately) there existed a significant contrast between relations in Parliament and those across many areas of the country.[43] Bernstein's examination of the Progressive Alliance in a number of case studies (Norwich, Leicester and Leeds) supported Petter's findings. His study highlighted the considerable difficulties the Liberal Party faced in 'containing' Labour within the framework of a 'progressive' alliance' not least because in many areas there simply no longer existed the conviction to maintain the policy.[44] Bernstein suggested that particularly at the municipal level Labour candidates appeared more willing to stand as out-and-out socialists and therefore assert their distinctiveness from the Liberals more obviously. This served to undermine prospects for the survival of the Progressive Alliance and furthermore, as Bernstein contends, the Liberals were in any case 'unable to come to terms with a movement which insisted upon espousing an ideology [often] hostile to their own'.[45]

Tanner's study of political change prior to 1918 adopted a very different approach to the politics of the Progressive Alliance. He concluded that the Progressive Alliance remained more or less intact in 1914 and prospects for continued co-operation between the left-of-centre parties appeared more positive than perhaps some previous interpretations might have implied.[46] He suggested that an 'immediate and fundamental realignment of forces' appeared unlikely.[47] For Tanner, the Liberals' inability to break the hold of the Conservatives in shaping working- class opinion in many parts of the country (alongside the existence of a genuinely social-democratic outlook) served to encourage and consolidate the party's willingness to co-operate with Labour. Whilst for the Labour Party its as yet 'half-formed appeal' (to specific groups) remained 'insufficient to make it a major anti-Tory party in the country as a whole'.[48] The fledgling Labour Party's strengths ultimately 'complemented those of

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[42] See M. Petter, 'The Progressive Alliance', *History*, 58 (1973).
[43] M. Petter, ibid, p. 48.
[44] G. Bernstein, 'Liberalism and the Progressive Alliance in the Constituencies 1900-1914: Three Case Studies', *Historical Journal*, 26 (1983) p. 617-40.
[45] Ibid, p. 637.
[46] See D. Tanner, *Political Change*, pp. 317-348.
[47] Ibid p.347.
[48] Ibid.

its progressive ally'.[49] For Tanner, these factors ensured that for the time being at least neither party was likely to opt out of a general framework of an electoral progressive coalition. What changed the political situation completely was the experience of war.[50]

In his recent *Parties and People: England 1914-1951*, McKibbin offers a new interpretation of the character and long-term viability of the Progressive Alliance in 1914. Whilst he recognises that the Progressive Alliance existed as a central plank of the stability of the Edwardian political system, and that co-operation with Labour 'upheld the Liberal Party' throughout its various crises after 1906, he concludes, however, that ultimately such an alliance had a pronounced sense of 'impermanence' about it. [51] Essentially, McKibbin's argument is that it is imperative to recognise that alliance between the Liberal and Labour parties was not in reality 'based upon a long-term programmatic affinity… but fundamentally on what proved to be the unfinished business of nineteenth century politics'.[52] By this he means that the Progressive Alliance was not ultimately about ideology (a new progressive and radical politics) but, as he perceives it, the 're-emergence of issues which most people thought had been settled'.[53] These included aspects such as the defence of Free Trade, the nonconformist conscience and industrial rights.[54] When, after 1918, these 'unifying issues' disappeared or were superseded by others the Progressive Alliance fell apart. It is hard not to see the logic in this argument and McKibbin's recent contribution to the debate surrounding the politics of the Progressive Alliance will be explored fully throughout this study.

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[49] See D. Tanner, *Political Change*, pp. 347-48. It is important to note that Tanner acknowledges that Labour was evidently unhappy to remain the 'junior partner' in the Progressive Alliance forever and beneath the veneer of alliance, as he points out, Labour clearly sought to expand its electoral base. Although, as things stood in 1914, the party appeared disinclined to break free and risk any progress which had been made.

[50] For Tanner's analysis of the impact of the First World War and the Progressive Alliance see *Political Change,* pp. 395-408.

[51] For McKibbin's evaluation of the Progressive Alliance see R. McKibbin, *Parties and People: England 1914-1951* (Oxford, 2010) pp. 2-20.

[52] Ibid p.3.

[53] Ibid.

[54] McKibbin even suggests that had the Conservative Party not adopted the outright opposition which it did on various issues (the 1909 budget, the constitution, Ireland, education to name just a few) the Progressive Alliance might have collapsed much sooner than it did. Moreover, he suggests that, in the first instance, had the Balfour administration overturned (for example) the Taff Vale decision, the Progressive Alliance might never have happened in the first place; see R. McKibbin, *Parties and People,* pp. 4-5.

The Position of the Parties after 1918

The 1918 general election recorded one of the most sweeping victories in modern British political history. Given the importance of the 1918 election it is perhaps surprising that it has been relatively neglected within the historiography (with the exception of Wilson, Turner and Morgan).[55] These studies of national politics (and in particular the split within the Liberal Party) have provided invaluable insight into the subject from this perspective as have studies examining the transformation of Labour during this critical period in the party's development.[56] Only a limited number of studies, however, have examined in detail the 1918 general election and its immediate aftermath at the local constituency level.[57] Many studies of Liberal and Labour politics at the constituency level have also tended to neglect the immediate post-war period (1918-1922) although it is arguably during this period that Liberal 'decline' is most appropriately located.[58]

Most historians agree that war damaged the Liberal Party in various critical ways; the party's unity and organisation was smashed and (equally important) war had a detrimental impact on Liberalism ideologically and culturally.[59] Wilson, however, suggests we should be careful in how we view 'the decline of the Liberal Party' reminding us that the parties of the left (i.e. Liberals and Labour combined) did not do as badly (during the early inter-war years) as subsequent Conservative domination

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[55] See T. Wilson, *Downfall*; T. Wilson, 'The British General Election of 1918', *Journal of Modern History* (1964); J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict 1915-1918,* (New Haven 1992); K. O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity, the Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918-1922* (Oxford 1979); E. David, 'The Liberal Party Divided 1916-1918', *Historical Journal,* 13, 1979; B. McGill, 'Asquith's Predicament, 1914-1918', *Journal of Modern History* (1967) and R. Douglas, 'The Background to the 'Coupon' Election Arrangements', *English Historical Review* (1971).

[56] See R. McKibbin, *Evolution.*

[57] These include M. Savage, *Dynamics*; B. Doyle, 'Urban Liberalism and the Lost Generation, Middle Class Culture in Norwich 1900-1935', *Historical Journal*, 38 (1995); J. Smyth, Resisting Labour: Unionists, Liberals and Moderates in Glasgow between the Wars, *Historical Journal* 46, 2 (2003). These vary in depth of electoral analysis and assessment of issues, however, and tend to focus on municipal politics (in particular Liberal-Conservative alliances) and pay limited (if any) attention to the locality's wider constituency politics (including the general elections).

[58] Lawrence, for example, ends his study of Wolverhampton in 1914, Tanner in 1918 and Cook's examination does not begin until 1922, neither does Clarke pay any great attention to either the 1918 or 1922 general elections; see J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*; D. Tanner, *Political Change*; C. Cook, *The Age of Alignment* (Toronto, 1975) and P. Clarke, *Lancashire.*

[59] For the best analysis of how the war impacted upon the Liberal Party ideologically and in terms of organisation see T. Wilson, *Downfall*, pp. 23-48. An equally important factor connected to this was a perceived decline of the political influence of religious nonconformity; see T. Wilson, *Downfall*, pp. 23-8.

might suggest.[60] The key difference was that before 1914 the parties 'managed their affairs between them to ensure maximum advantage from votes cast against the Conservatives,' i.e. within the context of the Progressive Alliance, whereas after 1914 Labour made a determined bid for power as a completely independent force. This served to destroy Liberalism as a potential governing force but, as Wilson rightly suggests, it also limited Labour's own chances of office in an immediate sense. Tanner argues that what was in fact developing was a three party system but given the effects of the British electoral system upon third parties the Liberals found themselves on the periphery (parliamentary results, of course, never reflected total popular support).[61]

Clarke suggested that organised Liberalism in Lancashire had been seriously undermined by the impact of war because the 'premises underpinning the progressive vote had been destroyed'.[62] The Liberal Party was simply no longer the 'best available instrument of progress'; by 1924, therefore, Lancashire Liberalism was only able to return MPs, in Clarke's words, 'on the basis of a sort of nonconformist bastard Toryism'.[63] Other historians have also suggested that a post-war Liberal recovery remained feasible and had a Progressive Alliance been re-established, inter-war politics could have been very different.[64]

In his study of the Liberals, the war and the franchise, Hart made the significant claim that pre-war Liberal voters formed the majority of the post-war Labour vote and a principle reason for this was simply because (for the most part) the Liberals were simply no longer 'progressive' after 1918.[65] Both propositions are, of course, complex and not necessarily easy to determine. Turner offers a detailed and interesting

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[60] Tanner has also suggested that it is very wise not to understate the Liberal Party's potential from 1918. He points to the fact that despite the party's poor national standing, the Liberals could still outpoll Labour in a number of working-class seats (particularly in areas where the candidates articulated a radical programme). Furthermore, the Liberals' performance in 1918 and up to 1922 was influenced by other factors, most notably, the impact of the Coalition which 'blurred their public image and damaged their performance', see D. Tanner, 'Class Voting and Radical Politics: the Liberal and Labour Parties, 1910-1931' in J. Lawrence and M. Taylor (eds) *Electoral behaviour in Britain since 1820* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 117.

[61] See D. Tanner, *Political Change*, pp. 419-422.

[62] See P. Clarke, *Lancashire*, pp. 395-397.

[63] Ibid.

[64] See E. F. Biagini and A. J. Reid, *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism and Party Politics in Britain 1850-1914*, (Cambridge, 1991), p. 19.

[65] See M. Hart, 'Liberals, War and the Franchise', *English Historical Review*, 97, (1982), pp. 820-32.

examination of how new electors may have voted in post-war general elections. He suggests that, contrary to the expectations perhaps, the higher the number of new voters, the less the swing towards Labour was. So, rather than propelling Labour forward, therefore, Turner concluded that franchise reform, in fact, hindered the party considerably.[66] This implies that trade-union based support (in the short term at least) continued to form the bedrock of Labour's support and the party did well primarily in areas where there was already an established presence. Given the localities examined, this will be an aspect of particular interest within the present study. Equally, one would assume that issues and policy during and after 1918 formed an essential component of any transfer of allegiance from Liberal to Labour. Whether such factors as the presence of sizeable groups of trade unionists or local political culture and party activity were more or less significant will be central to the discussion of post-war political change in subsequent chapters. One key example concerns the voting behaviour of miners. Turner claims that voters in the mining constituencies especially switched more strongly to Labour than elsewhere after 1918. The critical question, therefore, is to what extent was such transference of allegiance principally connected to the experience of the war itself or to what extent it may be attributed to more long term trends. In his study of the miners and British politics, Gregory concluded that in many mining areas Labour's prospects before 1914 appeared 'reasonably fair' and it was clear that a new generation of leaders were becoming increasingly committed to Labour 'almost to a man' so consequently the position of the Liberals in these constituencies might (implicitly) have become somewhat less secure than it had been to that point.[67] Detailed examination of an area such as Stoke-on-Trent may throw valuable light on this proposition.

In a major revision of his earlier thesis McKibbin has re-considered how the First World War impacted upon British politics and he illustrates very effectively how and why the experience of war changed the political landscape forever. War benefited the Conservatives whilst obviously disadvantaging the Liberal Party but, as McKibbin shows, more fundamentally, the experience of war served the Labour Party's 'ideological and tactical interests' not least because it decidedly 'settled the vexed

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[66] See J. Turner, 'The Labour Vote and the Franchise after 1918: An Investigation of the English Evidence', *History and Computing* (1987), pp. 136-142.
[67] See R. Gregory, *The Miners and British Politics* (Oxford, 1978), p. 191.

question of [the party's] relationship with the Liberals' and wartime policies and issues surrounding reconstruction were clearly 'more associated with Labour than any other party'. War strengthened the position of the trade unions but perhaps more importantly, as he perceives it, it turned the Conservatives and Labour into class parties and this was concurrent with increasing class 'homogenization' (within both the working and middle classes).[68] McKibbin suggests that the effect of this was to ultimately give those two parties 'an irreducible core of social support'. The Liberal Party meanwhile was not a class party and was consequently ill-positioned to attract widespread electoral appeal in the way it had been able to in the past. McKibbin's new analysis is, of course, highly significant and these themes will be explored fully in the later sections of this thesis.

The Electoral Sociology Approach[69]

As is evident from what has been discussed, a number of historians have placed considerable emphasis upon the importance of sociological change and its role in electoral politics in the aftermath of the First World War. They have contended that, above all else, class was fundamental to influencing political realignment after 1918.[70] The 'sociological' approach to British political history suggests some neatness in connection to electoral development, that sociological change, principally the emergence of a homogenised working class identity, more or less exclusively explains electoral change.[71] An obvious advocate of this view was Henry Pelling who saw the rise of the Labour Party (at the expense of the Liberals) as virtually inevitable, 'a result of long-term social and economic changes which were simultaneously uniting Britain geographically and dividing her in terms of class'.[72]

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[68] R. McKibbin, *Parties and People*, pp. 29-32.

[69] For an excellent consideration of electoral sociology and its application to the decline of the Liberal Party and rise of Labour debate see D. Tanner 'Class Voting and Radical Politics: Liberal and Labour Parties, 1910-1931 in J. Lawrence and M. Taylor, *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1820* (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 107-130.

[70] See for example H. Pelling, *Origins of the Labour Party*; R. McKibbin, *Evolution*; K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour*.

[71] For a good evaluation of the debate on the emergence of class politics see G. Searle, *The Liberal Party, Triumph and Disintegration 1886-1929* (London, 1992), pp.55-59. For a defence of class-based interpretations of the period see N. Kirk, 'In Defence of Class: A critique of recent revisionist writings upon the nineteenth century English working-class', *International Review of Social History*, 32 (1987), pp. 2-47.

[72] See H. Pelling, 'Labour and the Downfall of Liberalism' in *Popular Politics and Society* (London, 1979 edition), p. 120. Pelling did, however, recognise that such change would inevitably be slow because sectional interests such as religion remained powerful forces and so were likely to inhibit Labour's expansion (before the First World War in any case); see H. Pelling, *Modern Britain, 1885-*

The social and economic consequences of the First World War have been the subject of intense historical debate. For many years labour and social historians perceived the First World War as the instigator of considerable social and political change, the latter transformed in consequence of the former since war (they claimed) created a more homogenised working-class and served to encourage antagonistic class sentiments. These social changes, they contended, had a significant impact upon party politics and upon the voting behaviour of manual workers in particular.

First published in 1965, Arthur Marwick's *The Deluge* emphasised economic gains made by some of the working-classes in the form of wage increases and new employment opportunities.[73] Another aspect of his interpretation of the impact of war was that the process of change it instigated was of critical importance in determining political outcomes; war circumstances, he suggested, were 'critical in the precise way in which the Labour Party developed in the 1920s', not least because war 'tested old laissez-faire ideas [which] gave appeal and credibility to Labour's aims'.[74] Other historians supported Marwick's interpretation, most notably Waites (in a number of studies examining the effects of the First World War on class, status and the British working-class), Winter (particularly in his assessment of the impact of war on living standards and aspects such as civilian health) and Cronin (in his important work *Labour and Society in Modern Britain*).[75] Explicit in the work of social and labour historians was the belief that socio-economic change during the war created a climate of dissatisfaction, raised expectations of entitlement and increased confidence about what government might achieve served to propel Labour forward as the principal party of the industrial working-classes.[76] Other historians, however, have highlighted the complex nature of socio-economic change and its relationship to the political

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1955 (Edinburgh, 1960), p.6 and also F. Bealey and H. Pelling, *Labour and Politics*. In his *Social Geography of British Elections* (London, 1967), however, Pelling suggested how regional influences continued to shape electoral behaviour well into the twentieth century (including after the First World War).

[73] See A. Marwick, *The Deluge* (London, 1991), p. 344.

[74] Ibid, pp. 345-348.

[75] See B. Waites, 'The Effects of the First World War on Class and Status 1910-1920', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11 (1976); B. Waites, A *Class Society at War 1914-1918* (Leamington Spa, 1987); J. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (1985); J. Cronin, *Labour and Society* ( ) and J. Cronin, 'The Crisis of State and Society in Britain 1917-1922 in L. Haimson and C. Tilly (eds) *Strikes. Wars and Revolution in International Perspective* (1989), pp. 462-468. For an alternative view see A. Reid, 'The Impact of the First World War on British Workers' in A. Wall and J. Winter (eds) *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe 1914-1918* (1988).

[76] See, for example, K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour* (1984).

transformation which occurred in the aftermath of the First World War.[77] In particular, a number of historians have provided a valuable insight into a range of occupational groups and specific industrial sectors and their findings have questioned earlier assumptions about the precise impact of war upon the British working-classes. This research has suggested that the impact of war was less pronounced and far less uniform than traditional interpretations might have contended.[78] Whilst war may have no doubt improved the position of some workers, it did not (they suggest) transform the position of all workers and in the process encourage feelings of repression and class antagonism across the entire working-class. Furthermore, historians such as Tanner have suggested that, in the first instance, changes in national wages rates and living standards, critical (and commonly used) measures of the impact of war, have always represented an unsatisfactory means of determining the real impact of war since they do not take in to account the regional and sectoral nature of change.[79] As Tanner points out, it is imperative to recognise that the '*experience* of war was mixed and that the *interpretation* of that experience was equally variable'.[80] This meant that attitudes of workers towards the government and politics were exceptionally varied; it was dependent upon sector. The experience of workers in the non-essential sectors (consumer goods such as pottery, for example) was far less favourable than for the state-controlled industries. Here, as a number of historians have illustrated, workers experienced longer hours, poor conditions and insecure employment prospects.[81] This was in significant contrast to the state-controlled industries which benefited from regular employment, higher wage increases, and collective bargaining.[82]

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[77] See, for example, D. Tanner, 'Class Voting and Radical Politics: the Electoral Expansion of the Labour Party 1910-1931' in M. Taylor and J. Lawrence (eds.) *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Modern Britain* (1997). For the opposing approach to Marwick et al see also T. Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of war: Britain and the Great War 1914-1918* (1986); R. Rubin, *War Law and Labour: the Munitions' Acts, State Regulation and the Unions 1915-1921* (Oxford, 1987) and H. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880* (London, 1989); It ought to be noted that a small number of historians have supported Marwick's approach, see, for example, N. Whiteside, 'The British Population at War' in J. Turner, *Britain and the First World War* (1988) and J. M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War 1914-1918* (1989).

[78] For a good analysis of this body of work see D. Tanner, *Political Change* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 353-355.

[79] See D. Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 357.

[80] Ibid. The emphasis is mine.

[81] See P. E. Dewey, 'Military Recruiting and the British Labour Force during the First World War', *Historical Journal* (1994) and R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour: Work and Social Change in the Pottery Industry* (London, 1990), pp. 110-116.

[82] For analysis of the state controlled industries see B. E. Supple, *The History of the Coalmining Industry* (London, 1987); P. S. Bagwell, *The Railwaymen* (London, 1963) and E. Taplin, *The Dockers Union* (Leicester, 1985).

Recent studies, therefore, have emphasised the fragmented nature of the working-class experience of war on the home front. Approaches which suggested an increasingly common experience of work underpinning a 'uniform oppositional class consciousness' has gained little support among historians in the recent past. Consequently, historians have argued that sociological change alone does not explain the changes British politics witnessed in the early decades of the twentieth century[83] and have stressed the complexities of society and culture suggesting that there existed a multitude of influences in relation to how class groups perceived themselves and the world around them.[84] Moreover, like Tanner, some have also questioned the basic methodological presumptions underpinning the electoral sociology approach.

The most significant assault upon a class based approach to the political history of the first half of the twentieth century has been from Lawrence and Taylor. [85] They have argued that political historians should 'pause and think' before adopting an electoral sociology approach and instead should 'develop a more contextualised and less concept-driven understanding of electoral behaviour in the past' and, moreover, adopt an approach which recognises the wide array of influences on voting behaviour.[86] Tanner has also made a significant contribution to the reassessment of how we ought to interpret the role of sociological change in political re-alignment in Britain.[87] He advises the need to adopt a 'fuller and [more] interdisciplinary analysis' of the changes facilitating Labour's electoral growth and his own work suggests that Labour's expansion was, in fact, ' a long, drawn-out and incremental process which was incomplete [even] by 1931'.[88] Crucially, Tanner argues that whilst social change created a 'potentially encouraging new climate for Labour', post-war expansion was not, however, simply a result of the 'inevitable outcome of class'; rather 'Labour

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[83] See for example J. Lawrence, 'Popular Radicalism and the Socialist Revival in Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), pp. 163-86 and D. Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (Yale, 1998), pp. 8-12.
[84] See P. Joyce, *Visions of the People, Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848*-1914, (Cambridge, 1991) and *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth Century England*, (Cambridge, 1994).
[85]See introduction in J. Lawrence and M. Taylor, *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour*, pp. 1-26 and chapter in the same book by J. Lawrence, 'The Dynamics of Urban Politics 1867-1914', pp.79-105.
[86] See ibid p. 15.
[87] See in particular D. Tanner, 'Class voting and Radical Politics: the Liberal and Labour Parties, 1910-1931 in J. Lawrence and M. Taylor, *Party, State, Society*, pp. 106-130.
[88] Ibid, p,106.

created its own expansion...by learning to represent peoples needs'.[89] As Tanner explains, this may have created 'a deep sense of political loyalty (expressed in terms of class) but it was a gradual, partial and uneven process which was not determined by social and cultural forces alone'.[90] Ultimately, Tanner rejects the absolute determining role of social change and argues the case for a more integrated assessment of political development, in particular one which recognises the 'power of politics'. Political events contributed significantly to determining the fortunes of the respective parties but that was only half the story, as Tanner concludes: 'Labour's breakthrough in 1918 had to be built into a firm political platform... it had to prove itself as a practical party [and] meet the needs of a new electorate and a new set of social circumstances'.[91] The way Labour set about doing this and, indeed, the response of the party's rivals will be explored throughout the later sections of this study.

Municipal Politics and the Historical Debate

For a number of historians Labour's expanding municipal representation before 1914 underpinned their arguments for an inevitable (or likely) advance.[92] They have concluded that, between 1908 and 1914 the Labour Party made an 'unbroken series of gains'.[93] Moreover, had it not been for structural impediments such as the limited franchise and the complexity of registration laws Labour's expansion in local politics might have been even more rapid.[94] Others, however, have questioned the extent to which the Labour Party had 'broken the mould' of municipal politics in Britain before 1914.[95] Furthermore, the extent to which the municipal franchise did in fact

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[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid, p.124.
[92] See R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, 1974; K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour;* M. G. Sheppard and J. L. Halstead, 'Labour's Municipal Election Performance in Provincial England and Wales 1901-1913', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History* (1979); B. Lancaster, *Radicalism, Co-operation and Socialism, Politics in Leicester1860-1906* (Leicester ,1987).
[93] McKibbin points out how Labour's net gains across the country were 23, 78 and 85 in 1909, 1911 and 1913 respectively, see R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, p. 85.
[94] See M. G. Sheppard, 'The Effects of the Franchise Provisions on the Social and Sex Composition of the Municipal Electorate 1882-1914', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 45 (1982).
[95] See T. Adams, 'Liberals, Labour and the First World War; Politics, Economy and the Decline of Local Peculiarity', *Journal of Local and Regional Studies* (summer 1990); C. Cook, 'Labour and the Downfall of the Liberal Party 1906-1914' in A. Sked and C. Cook (eds) *Crisis and Controversy: Essays in Honour of A. J. P. Taylor* (London, 1976); A. W. Purdue, 'The Liberal and Labour Parties in North East Politics 1900-1914; the Struggle for Supremacy', *International Review of Social History*, 11 (1976); M. Pugh, 'Yorkshire and the New Liberalism', *Journal of Modern History*, Supplement, 50 (1978). For analysis of the municipal franchise and the position of Labour, see D. Tanner, 'Election

disadvantage Labour has also been questioned. Tanner, for example, has claimed that the case as advanced by McKibbin et al (that the un-enfranchised before 1914 might be perceived as a natural Labour block) is neither 'sociologically plausible nor empirically sustainable'.[96] Davis's research has also shown how registration laws and requirements relating to ratings no longer discriminated heavily against the working-class; in fact, he suggests that the electorate in areas such as factory towns and poor inner-city slums became dominated by the working-class.[97] Arguments concerning the municipal franchise existing as an obstacle to Labour's early progress, therefore, are now generally approached with caution.

The extent to which a Labour advance in municipal politics provides evidence for an inevitable national realignment remains an area of considerable debate. Irrespective of debates surrounding the municipal franchise a number of local studies have concluded that by 1914 Labour experienced considerable difficulties in making progress in municipal representation; in some areas it appears the fledgling organisation had 'failed miserably' to obtain a foothold in municipal government.[98] Others, however, have concluded that, despite being incomplete, Labour's potential was clearly apparent; after all obstacles such as the franchise, weakness of local organisation and finances could all change in time. In his study of municipal politics, Cook suggests that the Liberal Party had failed to achieve an effective electoral strategy at the municipal level and, in particular, had been unable to determine what ought to be done with respect to Labour. Significantly, Cook claimed that in some places the Liberals had even begun to form alliances with the Conservatives in order to 'pre-

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Statistics and the Rise of Labour 1906-1931', *Historical Journal*, 34 (1991). Tanner's evidence suggests that the relationship between the extension of the franchise and the growth of Labour was far less straightforward than some historians had implied, see, D. Tanner, 'Election Statistics', p. 906.

[96] See D. Tanner, 'The Parliamentary Electoral System, the Fourth Reform Act and the Rise of Labour in England and Wales', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research,* 56 (1983), pp. 205-219.

[97] See J. Davis, 'Slums and the Vote, 1867-1890', *Historical Research*, 64 (1991), pp. 375-388 and more recently; 'The Enfranchisement of the Urban Poor in Late-Victorian Britain' in P. Ghosh and L. Goldman (eds) *Politics and Culture in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 2006).

[98] Adams evaluation of Labour's progress in Hull, Cardiff, Sheffield, Liverpool and the East End of London, for example, demonstrates the fragility of Labour's pre-war municipal position; see T. Adams, *Liberals, Labour and the First World War*. Likewise, Tanner demonstrates how Labour's municipal fortunes fluctuated across the country and he concludes that in many areas it was the Liberal Party which remained the most important working class party at the local level, see D. Tanner, *Political Change*, pp. 4-8, 149, 157-58, 275-278 and 300-303.

empt' a Labour challenge.[99] Although ultimately Cook admitted that apart from a few industrial areas the Labour Party's progress remained tentative or non-existent.

Consideration of municipal politics and the debate surrounding the decline of the Liberal Party and rise of Labour has tended to focus primarily on the question of numerical expansion (i.e. the respective representation of the parties on the local authorities). In order to obtain a more thorough understanding of political change before and after 1914, it is equally important to examine council politics itself. Aspects such as the influence of the new Labour representatives on the councils, the degree of 'progressive' co-operation and the ideological position of the established parties (especially the Liberals) are all important when evaluating political change during the early twentieth century. Although overall control might have remained a distant prospect for the Labour Party before 1914, this should not necessarily be taken to imply that the new Labour groups remained of peripheral importance.[100] Although there is some restriction on the depth of analysis possible, the present study provides a broad overview of these dimensions of municipal politics in the localities examined. Analysis of municipal politics is also invaluable in terms of assessing how Liberalism at the local level responded to the wider challenges it faced after the First World War. Recently, historians such as Doyle have provided a valuable insight into the ways in which the Liberal Party in some areas continued to be a successful electoral force in local politics long after 1918.[101] Whilst municipal performance presents a number of methodological problems in that one is often not comparing like for like or that a locality's 'peculiarities' are often more pronounced at this level, local politics (in particular the local municipal elections) nonetheless can provide a valuable insight into the parties general progress in a given locality.[102] Given the frequency of the municipal contests they also provide more opportunities to assess change in popular electoral preferences.

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[99] C. Cook, 'Labour and the Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1906-1914' in A. Sked and C. Cook (eds), *Crisis and Controversy: Essays in Honour of A. J. P. Taylor* (London, 1976), pp. 55-58 and 62.

[100] For a full consideration of the ability of Labour councillors to get proposals adopted see M. Cahill, 'Labour in the Municipalities' in K. D. Brown (ed) *The First Labour Party, 1906-1914* (London, 1985).

[101] See Doyle's work on the Liberal Party in Norwich which concludes that the Liberals managed to sustain considerable middle-class nonconformist allegiance well into the 1930s, B. Doyle, 'Urban Liberalism and the Lost Generation: Politics and Middle Class Culture in Norwich 1900-1935', *Historical Journal*, 38 (1995), pp. 617-34.

[102] For a consideration of the methodological difficulties of examining municipal election performance see D. Tanner, 'Election Statistics and the Rise of Labour 1906-1931', *Historical Journal*, 34 (1991).

The State of the Debate

It is fair to say that historians have tended to move away from structural and sociological explanations of the decline of the Liberal Party and subsequent rise of Labour and have instead stressed a multitude of factors which influenced political change before and after the First World War. Aspects underpinning political change during this period continue to attract considerable academic attention and will no doubt generate debate for some time. Politics in Britain before 1914 presents a complex picture and firm predictions as to what might have been are necessarily fraught with danger. One thing is clear, however, and that is that much depended on the relationship between the two left-of-centre parties. McKibbin has astutely concluded that there were two pivotal determinants vital to that relationship (and thus critical to the whole political system as it stood); first, the extent to which there existed issues on which the progressive parties could agree and secondly, the extent to which Labour was prepared to remain subordinate within the party system.[103] Answers to both these questions are difficult to ascertain although the present study intends to explore them within the context of comparative analysis of two important English industrial localities, Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent.

Reasons for the Study of Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent

In 1844 Disraeli declared that 'rightly understood Manchester is as great a human exploit as Athens'.[104] Many contemporary observers agreed that Manchester represented a significant transformation in urban development (for good and for bad). Manchester became symbolic of a new era and it was perhaps inevitable that it would also be hugely significant in the context of political development in Britain during both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Manchester developed a strong and distinctive Liberal political tradition personifying the Free Trade movement of the nineteenth century and in the process produced Britain's first ever modern pressure group, the Anti-Corn Law League, established in 1838. Manchester appeared to symbolise a new era in relation to class. The industrial and commercial middle-classes catapulted to a new position of influence. At the same time Manchester played a central role in the development of a national campaign for democratic reform,

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[103] See R. McKibbin, *Parties and People*, p. 32.
[104] Disraeli quote cited in A. Kidd, *Manchester*, (Keele, 1993), p. 38.

Chartism.[105] The development of the national Labour movement also owed a considerable debt to Manchester. Historians have recognised the city's radical journalist Robert Blatchford as being hugely influential in giving the movement for independent labour representation a significant push at a critical time in its development.[106] Besides his *Clarion* newspaper, Blatchford's *Merry England* published in 1893 was influential for many radicals and the establishment of a Manchester Independent Labour Party in 1892 represented a new type of political organisation, its very name implying a new purpose. Alongside the Bradford Labour Union the Manchester ILP precipitated the emergence of the national Independent Labour Party, the creation of which was to change British politics forever. Manchester's contribution to the development of Liberal and Labour politics was immense; as one historian has suggested it had become a 'pioneer of Progressivism'.[107] From this perspective alone, examination of Manchester during a period of significant political change is of special interest and certainly for contemporaries the city had always been regarded as having a national significance beyond almost all others. The symbolic value of success or failure in Manchester remained considerable well into the twentieth century.

The last twenty years or so has seen a number of studies examining constituency politics in various localities and several have considered Liberal and Labour politics in Manchester.[108] Moore's recent assessment of the transformation of urban Liberalism provides an excellent study of the Liberal Party in Manchester towards the end of the nineteenth century whilst McHugh's examination explores Labour Party

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[105] J. Walton, *Lancashire: A Social History* 1558-1939 (Manchester, 1994), p. 129.

[106] See, for example, H. Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party* and *A Short History of the Labour Party.*

[107] See J. Moore, 'Progressive Pioneers: Manchester Liberalism', *Historical Journal* (2001), p. 991.

[108] Studies which examine aspects of Manchester's political, cultural and social history include T. Adams, 'Labour Vanguard, Tory Bastion, or the Triumph of New Liberalism? Manchester Politics 1900-1914 in Comparative Perspective', *Manchester Region History Review*, 14, 2000; L. T. Bather, 'Manchester and Salford Trades Council from 1880', *Bulletin for the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 6 (1963); A. Davies and S. Fielding (ed), *Workers' Worlds: Cultures and Communities in Manchester and Salford, 1880-1939*, (Manchester, 1992); S. Fielding, 'Irish Politics in Manchester, 1890-1914', *International Review of Social History,* 33 (1988) M. Hewitt, *The Emergence of Stability in the Industrial City: Manchester, 1832-67* (Aldershot, 1996); J. Hill, 'Manchester and Salford Politics and the Early Development of the Independent Labour Party', *International Review of Social History*, 24 (1981); A. Kidd, *Manchester* (Keele, 1993); D. McHugh, 'The Labour Party in Manchester and Salford before the First World War: A Case of Unequal Development', *Manchester Regional History Review*, 14 (2000); N. Reid, 'Manchester and Salford ILP: A More Controversial Aspect of the Pre-1914 Era', *Bulletin of the North West Labour History Society*, 5 (1978) and E. D. Simon, *A City Council From Within* (London, 1926).

politics in the city throughout the 1920s.[109] No single study, however, has examined in detail Liberal and Labour politics in Manchester during the critical period between 1906 and 1922. A number of national surveys of constituency politics have paid some attention to Manchester: Tanner's study of political change between 1900 and 1918 provides interesting analysis of the North-West region and Clarke's seminal study of Lancashire also provides invaluable consideration of the county's largest and most important urban area. These do not, however, provide an exhaustive consideration of electoral development in Manchester throughout the whole period examined here (before and immediately after the First World War).

Like Manchester, the six towns in North Staffordshire (popularly known as the Potteries) which merged into a federated borough called Stoke-on-Trent in 1910 represented an obvious product of British industrialisation.[110] The area was at the forefront of Britain's earliest industrial development.[111] Josiah Wedgwood's Etruria works (founded in 1763) represented one of Britain's earliest factories and the region became recognised as the world's leading centre of ceramic manufacture. Stoke-on-Trent was one of Britain's great industrial cities but impressions of the area have largely been negative. Perceptions of the Potteries have been shaped to a large extent by two of the twentieth century's most successful novelists; Arnold Bennett and J. B. Priestley. Published in 1902, Bennett's popular series of stories set against the backdrop of the Potteries evoked a seemingly unchanged world, an area 'as remote from the rest of England as any part of the country could be'.[112] Over thirty years later Priestley, in his enormously influential *English Journey*, found the Potteries still 'like no other industrial region....unique in their remote, self-contained provincialism' and he concluded that this part of Britain represented Victorian industrialism in its 'dirtiest

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[109] See J. Moore, *The Transformation of Urban Liberalism* and D. McHugh, *Labour in the City: The Development of the Labour Party in Manchester 1918-1931* (Manchester, 2006).

[110] For consistency I have used the title Stoke-on-Trent throughout although it did not come into actual being until 1910 with the federation of the borough. Any reference simply to *Stoke* refers specifically to that town (i.e. Stoke-*upon*-Trent) which is one of the constituent components of the federated borough (after 1928, city) of Stoke-on-Trent.

[111] In many ways North Staffordshire has been overlooked in the history of economic and industrial development in Britain. Whilst the role of regions such as Lancashire and cities like Manchester is well established this region appears particularly neglected. Yet Stoke-on-Trent was a boom area; during the earlier part of the nineteenth century, at 60,000, its population was growing as rapidly as Manchester, see F. Burchill and R. Ross, *A History of the Potters' Union*, 1977.

[112] Frank Swinnerton in his introduction to the 1953 edition of Bennett's Anna of Five Towns reprinted in A. Bennett, *Anna of the Five Towns*, (London, 2001).

and most cynical aspect'.[113] Though clearly appreciative of the aesthetic impact of the local industry, both Bennett and Priestley depict an area remarkable in its sense of place and community; Priestley went so far as to suggest that the Staffordshire potters were the most contented of workers in any industrial area he had come across.[114]

Historians have generally perceived Stoke-on-Trent as an area in which both socio-economic and political development were notoriously slow; put simply, the Potteries changed little after the initial phase of industrial development. Common perceptions have been that the pottery industry remained backward, industrial relations were distinctly harmonious and trade unionism remained painfully slow to develop. In consequence political development in the area lagged behind Britain's other major industrial regions and demands for independent labour representation in particular were extremely slow in emerging. This was an area where loyalty to the Liberal Party was exceptionally strong and popular working-class Liberalism was underpinned by the predominance of religious nonconformity. Essentially, the North Staffordshire Potteries represented a tightly knit industrial community where traditional political loyalties and allegiances were especially pronounced. During an era which saw the appearance of a political movement whose aims represented a major attempt fundamentally to change the face of politics and political structures in places like the Potteries, Stoke-on-Trent makes an interesting area to evaluate.

Compared to many of Britain's other major industrial regions the literature on the North Staffordshire Potteries is extremely limited. A number of studies have assessed the history of trade unionism in the area notably Gregory's *The Miners and British Politics* which considers the politics of the miners in the region, providing extremely detailed analysis of the area's development in this respect.[115] There have been a number of wider electoral studies that have included some assessment of the area. But despite an increase in the number of detailed studies of early twentieth century constituency politics in various localities (some of which have already been mentioned) few have paid attention to the North Staffordshire area and no single study has exclusively examined the political history of the Potteries. One historian who has

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[113] J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (Ilkley, 2009), p. 207 and p. 193.
[114] Ibid p. 201 and p. 207.
[115] R. Gregory, *Miners and British Politics*.

shed valuable light on many aspects of social and political change in this region is Richard Whipp in his excellent study *Patterns of Labour: Work and Social Change in the Pottery Industry* (1990)[116] although, again, the area's political development does not constitute the principal focus. As alluded to above, Stoke-on-Trent is particularly worthy of detailed study for a number of reasons. The North Staffordshire Potteries are an extremely good example of what can be described as 'an isolatable case study which offers scope for intensive investigation'.[117] The area's boundaries were clearly defined and the six towns remained more or less isolated from the surrounding industrial regions of Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool. Communities within the Potteries were exceptionally close-knit, more so perhaps than most other parts of the country. In terms of class composition, the six towns were dominated by the industrial working-classes. This is not to suggest there was not a middle-class presence but compared to other towns and cities the Potteries lacked the distinctively middle-class enclaves that had become a key feature of social development towards the end of the nineteenth century. Religious nonconformity, particularly Primitive Methodism which had been conceived in the area, bound the tight-knit communities together more so than in many other regions of England.[118] Ultimately, Stoke-on-Trent was remarkably homogeneous in socio-economic and religious composition and this gave the area a special character. This study offers a good opportunity to examine how the working-classes in such an industrial community responded to political change over a period that witnessed a rapidly changing political context.

Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent: Post-War Analysis

Few historians have paid attention to the political history of Stoke-on-Trent or Manchester during the immediate post-First World War period. As we will see, studies which have included some assessment of Stoke-on-Trent have tended to focus on the years before 1914 largely due to the national significance of the 1912 by-election.[119] No study has examined constituency politics in this area after the First World War. Analysis of political change in Stoke-on-Trent provides a valuable insight into political realignment after the upheaval of war. Before the outbreak of war

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[116] R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour: Work and Social Change in the Pottery Industry* (London, 1990)
[117] Thistlewaite quoted in R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour*, p. 2.
[118] Pelling suggests that by the turn of the century the influence of nonconformity could *only* be maintained in smaller (and somewhat isolated) towns; see H. Pelling, *Social Geography*, pp. 430-33.
[119] See R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, R. Gregory, *Miners and British Politics* and D. Tanner, *Political Change*.

industrial North Staffordshire was an area where popular working-class Liberalism remained strong and the prospect of an imminent Labour breakthrough seemed unlikely. The 1918 general election, however, saw a major advance for the Labour Party in the area (one of the most impressive across the country) and this was consolidated in 1922, by which time Labour held all of the borough's three parliamentary seats. The Liberal Party meanwhile had been fatally destabilised by the experience of war and whilst they successfully recaptured one of the borough's parliamentary seats very briefly in 1923, electoral politics in this former heartland had changed dramatically. In municipal politics Labour's advance after 1918 in Stoke-on-Trent was equally dramatic. The 1919 municipal elections resulted in Labour possessing 34 of the 100 seats on the town council and the party comfortably maintained its position thereafter. The following year saw Stoke-on-Trent being one of Labour's most successful towns (with 11 candidates elected from a total of 19) and from that point the party's representation steadily increased.[120] Given the political history of Stoke-on-Trent such a transformation was remarkable and evaluation of the locality from 1918 thus provides an excellent opportunity to explore factors underpinning political change during this critical period.

The city of Manchester has also been neglected within the historiography on post-war political change in Britain. Despite some detailed evaluation of Manchester's post-war politics in recent years it is necessary to make a number of points here. First, existing studies have tended to focus exclusively on the development of the Labour Party and have virtually ignored the position of the Liberal Party. Secondly, assessment of the process of political development itself (electoral campaigns in particular) has lacked depth of critical analysis.[121] Examination of Manchester suggests that the Liberal Party was not entirely decimated by the experience of wartime events and neither was a Labour advance immediately inevitable; in fact, the party found it difficult to maintain electoral stability in Manchester in the years immediately after 1918. This

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[120] See S. Davies, *Liverpool Labour* (Keele, 1996), pp. 84-85 (table showing Labour representation in county boroughs in descending order of Labour strength). By 1929 Stoke-on-Trent ranked in eighth place on this table (from 40) and the party's position (although dipping slightly in 1929) remained solid.

[121] McHugh's study of Manchester Labour politics after 1918, for example, provides little examination of the party's electoral strategy, policy or appeal during the 1918 or 1922 general elections or the two by-elections in 1919 and 1922 respectively; see D. McHugh, *Labour in the City: the Development of the Labour Party in Manchester 1918-1931* (Manchester, 2006).

presents a marked contrast to Stoke-on-Trent where Labour had established a strong (and seemingly secure) hold on the parliamentary politics of the borough from very early on in the post-war period. The 1923 general election demonstrated that the Liberals could still capture parliamentary seats in Manchester despite persistent difficulties and determined opposition. The city's Liberals had re-united the previous year and the party's organisation appeared to be in relatively good shape. The Labour Party's post-war ascendancy in Manchester on the other hand was neither immediate nor complete by 1923.

Religion and Local Political Culture

It is widely recognised that religion remained of critical significance in party political affiliations in Britain before 1914. As already mentioned, in Stoke-on-Trent religious nonconformity was exceptionally important in cementing popular working-class Liberalism. In Manchester, Anglicanism served to underpin popular working-class Conservatism in certain parts of the city whilst in other districts nonconformity may be linked to Liberal support and in others Catholic (i.e. Irish) communities were associated with Liberalism because of the Home Rule issue.[122] Religious affiliation played a critical role in party choice amongst voters. The question of religion and politics, therefore, is of especial interest within the present study. Historians have illustrated how the Liberal Party's resurgence after 1900 was fundamentally underpinned by the revival of political nonconformity. This was clearly a short-lived phenomenon, however, which did not survive the First World War and some historians have even gone so far as to suggest that nonconformity ceased to count at all politically after 1918.[123] Koss and Catterall, for example, have suggested that the Free Church leadership evidently became less exclusively Liberal after 1918 and this had the effect of lessening the political profile of nonconformity.[124] The influence of nonconformity in the evolution of the Labour Party has also been well documented; from its inception the parliamentary party had drawn the greater majority of its membership from the Free Churches and ideologically Labour drew a great deal of its

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[122] For a good evaluation of the influence of Anglicanism in Lancashire see T. Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes 1880-1939* (Oxford, 2001).

[123] See S. E. Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* (Connecticut, 1975).

[124] See ibid, p.324 and also P. Catterall, 'Nonconformity and the Labour Party', *Historical Journal*, 36, 3 (1993), pp. 668-676. For a very good assessment of how the social networks of nonconformity increasingly 'withdrew from active political Liberalism' after the war see R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures, England 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 90-92.

inspiration from radical nonconformity.[125] Many nonconformists were keen social reformers and their religious outlook underpinned their politics, as Smith suggests; the socialism of many early Labour activists was a peculiarly 'ethical kind and owed little to Marxist theory'.[126] In Stoke-on-Trent (an area which was predominantly nonconformist), as we will see, religious identity was central to both Liberal and Labour activists. Significantly, Koss claims that the most significant shift from Liberal to Labour after 1918 was amongst working-class nonconformists.[127] In an area such as Stoke-on-Trent which was both largely working-class and predominantly nonconformist such a shift (alongside political and economic change) has to be seen as of considerable relevance. This study aims to illustrate how local political culture (factors such as religion, the character of local trade unionism and social structures) could play a critical role in shaping the political development of an area. In the period before 1914, even in a place as industrial and as predominantly working-class as Stoke-on-Trent, the local political culture served to undermine the political influence of class consciousness.[128] Politics was very largely shaped by local issues and personalities. Of course, as Moore has recently pointed out, the 'everyday experience of politics' remained largely through the medium of local networks such as political clubs, trade unions and the like.[129] These were not only important as a means of political participation at the local level but also as a critical mechanism of political communication and furthermore they were essential for the efficiency of political organisation. From many perspectives, local political culture, i.e. the essential political, social and cultural features of the locality and the way in which these interconnected was of considerable significance and remained so throughout the period under consideration here. A study of Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent provides an interesting opportunity to examine first the solidity of the early twentieth century

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[125] See D. W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics 1870-1914,* (London, 1982); S. E. Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* (Connecticut, 1975); L. Smith, *Religion and the Rise of Labour* (Keele, 1993) and P. Catterall, 'Nonconformity and the Labour Party', *Historical Journal*, 36, 3 (1993).

[126] L. Smith, *Religion and the Rise of Labour*, p. 164.

[127] See Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics*, p. 234. It is important to note, however, that there might have been some variation between the Free Churches; Catterall's study, for example, suggests that after 1922 there was an identifiable shift by Methodists (the most working-class of all the chapels) towards the Conservative Party; see P. Catterall, 'Nonconformity and the Labour Party', p. 678.

[128] Recent works such as Lawrence's study of Wolverhampton have highlighted the significance of local factors on class identity and its relationship to political development (in particular the progress of the Labour Party); see J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People.*

[129] See J. R. Moore, *Transformation of Urban Liberalism*, p. 14 and p. 20.

Liberal revival, secondly the impact of the emergence of Labour and thirdly the position of the respective parties in the aftermath of the First World War.

The Political Significance of By-Elections

In addition to the five general election campaigns, Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent also saw six by-elections between 1906 and 1922. Detailed analysis of these by-elections offers a particularly valuable opportunity to examine aspects of political change in these localities. At the time, by-elections were perceived to provide an important insight into the way the political tide was flowing and the political parties certainly took them very seriously indeed. Whilst analysis of by-elections may be somewhat problematic in that the extent to which they demonstrate more long-term political realignment may be questioned they remain enormously useful in showing how the parties presented policy and, likewise, how the electorate responded to policy and issues. By-elections also provide additional insights into the strength of party organisation, relations between parties, internal party unity and the role of candidates. In particular, this study will emphasise the critical role played by candidates in shaping the political agenda and influencing political change on the ground. Some historians have cited poor by-election performance as evidence of a wider potential re-alignment in Britain politics in years immediately before the outbreak of the First World War. McKibbin, in particular, stressed that poor by-election results provide evidence of increasing Liberal weakness.[130] Surprisingly, however, few historians have evaluated, in detail, by-election campaigns in the early twentieth century. Yet, detailed evaluation of by-elections across a number of constituencies between 1906 and 1922 provides a valuable opportunity to test arguments relating to the position of the respective parties before 1914 (as indeed after).

Methodological Approaches and the 'New Political History'

Recent years have seen the emergence of what has been termed the 'new political history'.[131] This approach to the subject matter and methodology of the study of

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[130] See R. McKibbin, *Evolution,* pp. 82-7.

[131] Those associated with the 'new political history' include D. Tanner (*Political Change* and other work); L. Black, 'What Kind of People are You?: Labour, the People and the New Political History' in J. Callaghan et al (eds), *Interpreting the Labour Party: Approaches to Labour Politics and History*, (Manchester 2003) and J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*. Also, the recent series of books dealing with social and political aspects of English history since 1914 by R. McKibbin (*Classes and Culture*

twentieth century British politics has prompted some re-evaluation of what constitutes 'political history' and how the historian (as opposed to the political scientist) ought to go about examining it. The approach of the so-called 'new political history' is essentially a more holistic one in that the 'new' political historians have sought to provide a more integrated analysis of 'high politics' (institutions and leadership) alongside aspects such as political culture, ideology and, in Fielding's words, 'how this related to the people at large'.[132] There is an obvious appeal to the approach of the 'new political history'. Amongst other things political history was traditionally somewhat London-centric, tended to neglect the political importance of aspects such as local government and the regions and, furthermore, as Readman suggests, was perhaps guilty of a 'narrow-minded cult of the archive'.[133] The 'new political history' has aimed to avoid some of these pitfalls and sought to understand more fully the nature and development of the political parties (at the widest level) across the country. A critical aspect to emerge from the 'new political history' (implicitly perhaps) has been the recognition that, to use Tanner's phrase, the 'politics of place' remained enormously significant well into the twentieth century. The detailed study of electoral politics and political change in specific localities (such as those evaluated here) thus provides an opportunity to explore the evolving character of English progressivism during a period of significant political change.

The extent to which the 'new political history' offers an entirely innovative or radical approach to the study of twentieth century British politics might be questioned; after-all, the groundbreaking work between 1970 and 1990 of writers such as Russell, Blewett, Cook and Thorpe set new parameters for historians considering electoral politics and political change during the earlier part of the twentieth century.[134] These

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and Parties and People) should also be recognised as providing an integrated approach to political history.

[132] For an assessment of the impact of the 'new political history' see S. Fielding, 'Looking for the 'New Political History'', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42 (2007), pp. 515-524. Fielding concludes ultimately, however, that whilst it has been increasingly recognised by political historians that there is a need to 'transcend conventional notions of party politics' it is not always the case that such an approach is in fact obtained in practice, sees article cited above, p. 523.

[133] P. Readman, 'The State of Twentieth- Century British Political History', *Journal of Policy History*, 21, 3 (2009), p. 219. Readman provides an excellent overview of the waning fashions of British political history writing in recent years; see ibid, pp. 219-238.

[134] See A. K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide: The General Election of 1906* (Newton Abbot, 1973); N. Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties, and the People: The General Elections of 1910* (London, 1972); C. Cook, *The Age of Alignment: Electoral Politics in Britain, 1922-1929* (London, 1975) and A. Thorpe, *The British General Election of 1931* (Oxford, 1991).

historians were influenced by 'modern' political science methodologies (such as those pioneered by the Nuffield series) although their analysis remained very much from a historian's perspective. Yet overall, it is probably accurate to suggest that the 'new political history' has in many ways 'rediscovered and redefined' political history.[135] The 'new political history' has seen historians move away from (absolute) class-based interpretations of Labour expansion and Liberal decline and has clearly encouraged a more contextualised understanding of political change as it developed.

The electoral process and consequent political outcomes form the principal focus of this analysis of the rise and fall of the Progressive Alliance in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent between 1903 and 1922. Its methodological approach therefore rests significantly on detailed analysis of the various election campaigns (general elections, by-elections and municipal contests). It devotes particular attention to detailed consideration of the evolving character and influence of ideology and so examines contemporary issues and how the parties presented these to the electorate. In doing so it places the individual candidates at the centre of the political process as opposed to the periphery where one might conclude some political history writing appears to locate them. Traditional political historians overwhelmingly tended to concern themselves exclusively with 'high politics' and political leadership at the centre; in Cowling's famous phrase, 'the politicians that mattered'.[136] It could also be suggested that that the left-inclined writers of the 1970s and 1980s appeared also to negate the role of the individual; as Evans asserts, during that period of historical analysis one might have concluded that 'individual people [had] all but disappeared from the historian's vision'.[137] Another significant appeal therefore of the 'new political history' is a much greater recognition that individual political activists 'mattered' and ought not to be written out of the political process. Related to this, it is important not to overlook the extent to which political organisation and campaigning, as Davies and Morley comment, 'actively influenced, created and altered political opinion' since whilst 'cultural traditions might dispose different localities to varying political

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[135] For a good assessment of how the 'new political history' has done this see S. Pedersen, 'What is Political History Now?' in D. Cannadine (ed) *What is History Now* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 37.
[136] Cowling quote cited in P. Readman, 'The State of Twentieth Century British Political History', *Journal of Policy History,* 21, 3 (2009), p. 232.
[137] See R. J. Evans excellent prologue 'What is History?' in D. Cannadine (ed) *What is History Now?* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 1-17.

allegiances... the mobilisation of these allegiances could make a difference'.[138] This study devotes considerable attention to political organisation and campaigning and how such influenced political development in the two localities examined here.

One historian has recently argued that 'the need for political historians to enhance traditional approaches *in deed* as much as declaration is now more pressing than ever'.[139] Together with a far greater emphasis on the role of political culture, language and ideology, it seems ever more important that studies examining electoral politics and political change in Britain need to provide as holistic an approach as possible. One might concluded therefore that this requires detailed evaluation of each political campaign during the period examined before analysis of the wider political significance can be considered.[140] This study of electoral politics and political change in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent aims to employ such an approach and utilises a variety of resources including (where they are available) the respective party archives. However, it is worth acknowledging here that its singularly most important source is that of the contemporary press. Without doubt the press exists as *the* greatest portal the historian of early twentieth century politics has into the past. For the purpose of the study of election campaigns and party organisation, without it, it would simply be impossible to obtain a full understanding of political change.

Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent were localities where the Liberal Party had consolidated its position as a party representing large sections of the working class whilst retaining the support of its more 'traditional' (middle class support) and had developed a strong degree of co-operation with Labour but all these aspects presented potential difficulties for both parties.[141] The study of constituency politics by way of comparative analysis of two significant localities therefore provides an invaluable context by which to explore such themes of political identity, appeal and the

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[138] S. Davies and B. Morley, 'The Politics of Place: A Comparative Analysis of Electoral Politics in Four Lancashire Cotton Textile Towns, 1919-1939', *Manchester Region History Review*, 2000, Volume 14. p. 63.

[139] S. Fielding, 'Looking for the New Political History', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42 (2007), p. 516. The emphasis is mine.

[140] For discussion of the various approaches to analysis of political history see, for example, J. Lawrence, 'Political History', in S. Berger (ed), *Writing History: Theory and Practice* (London, 2003), pp. 183-202; S. Pedersen, 'What is Political History Now?' in D. Cannadine (ed) *What is History Now?* (Basingstoke, 2002); P. Readman, 'Speeches', in M. Dobson and B. Ziemann (ed) *Reading Primary Sources* (London, 2009).

[141] See for example D. Tanner, *Political Change*.

development of the 'progressive' parties. How did the Liberal Party in particular deal with the challenges it faced? How did the new Labour Party respond to a resurgent Liberalism and attempt to establish an independent political identity? These will constitute areas of particular interest throughout the earlier sections of this thesis. Whilst the experiences of Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent may not necessarily reflect developments elsewhere, such analysis, nonetheless, offers an extremely valuable insight into how politics evolved immediately before and after the outbreak of war in 1914.

Structure

The study is structured simply, in two main parts: the first section explores political change in the respective localities (the six constituencies of the city of Manchester and the two parliamentary seats of the borough of Stoke-on-Trent) between 1906 and 1914. The principle focus of this section shall be analysis of elections and party support. This entails detailed examination of the three general election campaigns and four critical parliamentary by-elections which took place in these localities before 1914. Additionally, municipal politics (elections and some evaluation of council politics) in Manchester will be evaluated.[142] The second section of the study evaluates political change in the aftermath of the First World War including analysis of (by now) ten Manchester and three Stoke-on-Trent parliamentary constituencies in the context of the critical general election campaigns of 1918 and 1922. Two important Manchester by-election campaigns (in 1919 and 1922) will also be considered alongside assessment of developments in municipal politics in the aftermath of war. The study is intended as a contribution to the body of work which has evaluated political change in Britain before and after the First World War paying particular attention to the politics of the Progressive Alliance at the local level in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent.

Conclusions

This study of electoral politics and political change between 1906 and 1922 by way of comparative analysis of Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent lends support to the view that

[142] It is necessary to note that evaluation of municipal politics in Stoke-on-Trent prior to 1914 presents some difficulty for reasons which are mentioned below; this dimension of political development, therefore, cannot be explored as fully in analysis of Stoke-on-Trent before 1914 as in Manchester. Post-war municipal politics in Stoke-on-Trent is far less problematic and that period is explored more fully.

a natural (or inevitable) advance of the Labour Party was by no means assured before 1914; at best the new party's prospects appeared tenuous. Assertions that future Labour growth was cemented prior to the outbreak of war appear to be wholly without foundation when one considers electoral politics in these parts of industrial Britain. Furthermore, Labour's progress was in consequence of a considerable degree of Liberal acquiescence. The Labour Party did not achieve its parliamentary breakthrough on its own accord; it did so from within the framework of the Progressive Alliance. As this study shows, the Progressive Alliance came under certain pressure in the period immediately before the outbreak of war although it would be unwise to predict its imminent demise. The historian can only guess as to how long the Progressive Alliance would remain a feature on the political landscape. When the Progressive Alliance did break down before 1914 the consequences served to demonstrate the fragility of Labour's progress; when the new party challenged the Liberals it fared extremely badly. Breakdown of progressive co-operation could also undermine the electoral position of the Liberal Party since Labour intervention could split the so-called 'progressive' vote thus facilitating a Unionist victory at the expense of the Liberals. Recognition of this fact may, however, have encouraged the re-establishment of the policy of the Progressive Alliance, although this remains speculative.

Analysis of the Liberal Party prior to 1914 in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent illustrates the extent of regional variation in relation to the permeation of the 'New Liberalism'. In Stoke-on-Trent, Liberalism (as indeed Labour) appeared progressive and receptive to advanced policy formation, yet in Manchester this study shows that it is unwise to exaggerate the impact of the 'New Liberalism' in the city; Liberalism there appeared noticeably traditional and conservative. Clarke's contention that the Edwardian period heralded an altogether new era for Liberalism, and that this constituted a major element in relation to the party's revival and continued electoral strength, needs to be viewed with some caution. This study suggests that Liberalism in Manchester appeared to be electorally significant although it did not appear to be ideologically vibrant.

A number of historians have identified poor by-election performance as an indicator of increasing Liberal weakness in the years leading up to the First World War.

Detailed examination of the four by-elections in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent between 1908 and 1912 provides little support for such a view. Poor by-election performance can be explained largely by adverse public reaction to specific policy and legislation and whilst electoral defeat demonstrates the fine line the Liberal Party was treading with the introduction of advanced social, economic and political reform it does not, however, necessarily imply a wider and long-term crisis for the party.

Examination of electoral politics in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent from 1918 illustrates the fragmented nature of political change in the aftermath of the First World War. In 1918, Stoke-on-Trent saw a significant swing to the Labour Party and the virtual destruction of the Liberals which, given the electoral history of the borough, represented a monumental reversal in party fortunes. Labour's advance was consolidated further in 1922, by which time the party held two of the three parliamentary constituencies and had come very close to capturing the other (from an independent Labour member). In Manchester, however, the Labour Party saw no such electoral breakthrough and in some respects its position remained as precarious as it had done before the war. Equally, the Liberal Party fared much better in Manchester than in industrial North Staffordshire. There were a number of political events which disadvantaged the Liberals from 1918 which at the same time helped Labour's expansion but this study concludes that, besides the political situation (the national Liberal split) the power of politics (policy and issues) was of central importance in the speed and character of the political re-alignment which took place in the aftermath of the First World War.

Chapter 2: Electoral Politics and Party Support in Manchester, 1906-1914

2.1: The 1906 General Election in Manchester

Throughout the decade before 1905 Liberalism had remained organisationally and electorally weak in Manchester.[1] The party had fared badly in the parliamentary elections of 1895 and 1900 and had been divided over the Boer War. Many of the party's wealthier supporters had left the city leaving an inevitable dent in the party's financial position. Neither was the Liberal Party making identifiable progress in municipal politics and the Unionists had consolidated their position on the council. The cumulative effect of these factors was that early twentieth century Liberalism in Manchester appeared to be something of a lame duck. Consequently, a major re-organisation of the Liberal Party in Manchester was essential. This happened in 1903 with the formation of the Manchester Liberal Federation. The main objective of the federation was to co-ordinate the work of the six divisional Liberal Associations of the city. It should be remembered that the early twentieth century saw a major overhaul of the Liberal Party nationally and this was to prove critical to the revival of Liberalism after 1905. As Russell suggests, on becoming Chief Whip in 1899 Gladstone had recognised that the local Liberal organisations had become largely ineffective. Registration and canvassing work was poor and, more worryingly, candidates who did not possess their own independent wealth were effectively discouraged from putting themselves forward.[2] Gladstone therefore set about addressing the critical question of organisation. Between 1900 and 1905 Gladstone and his staff had reinvigorated the Liberal organisation, the party possessed a substantial election fund, good quality candidates had been in constituencies for some time, the central office was well equipped with propaganda material and crucially there had been a successfully negotiated 'agreement' with the newly created Labour

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[1] For a detailed examination of Liberal politics in Manchester during the 1880s (to 1895) see J. Moore, *The Transformation of Urban Liberalism: Party Politics and Urban Governance in Late Nineteenth Century England* (Aldershot, 2006).

[2] See A. K. Russell, 'Laying the Charges for the Liberal Landslide: The Revival of Liberal Organisation, 1902-1905' in A. J. Morris (ed) *Edwardian Radicalism, 1900-1914: Some aspects of British Radicalism*, (London and Boston, 1974), pp. 62-74 and see also the Liberal Party treasurer's warning to the National Liberal Federation at its annual general meeting in 1903; *National Liberal Federation Proceedings of the Annual Meetings*, 1903.

Representation Committee.[3] Consequently, Liberal organisation in Manchester had improved enormously.[4]

From the beginning of the campaign, the 1906 general election was conducted amidst an air of considerable optimism within the Liberal ranks across the country. The record of the late Conservative Government had alienated many voters and the Liberal Party's ability to exploit these prevailing grievances gave the party the edge throughout the campaign. This, combined with a wider range of issues addressed by the Liberal candidates was in marked contrast to the Unionists who chose to focus on an extremely narrow range of issues. Furthermore, the Liberals presented a more united front, all candidates appearing strongly supportive of the official (national) party policy. The Unionist candidates did not display such unity and these (well publicised) disagreements, primarily concerning fiscal policy, proved detrimental to the party's prospects.

Of Manchester's six parliamentary divisions, four were contested by Liberals, two by the Labour Representation Committee (hereafter LRC) while all were contested by Unionist candidates. The two left-of-centre parties had selectively targeted seats they believed each would be most capable of winning. The Liberal and Labour candidates were all what might be described as 'traditional' in terms of their occupations and background. The Liberals included two businessmen (Charles Schwann and Arthur Haworth), a Kings Council (Thomas Horridge) and a journalist (Winston Churchill) and the LRC candidates were both prominent local trade union organisers (J. R. Clynes and George Kelley). From the beginning of the contest both the local Liberal organisation and press were anxious to affirm their support for Clynes and Kelley. The *Manchester Evening News* concluded that official Liberalism had 'realised that

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[3] See speeches by Augustine Birrell and Dr John Massey, *National Liberal Federation Proceedings of the Annual Meetings*, 1905.

[4] See *Manchester Liberal Caucus Minutes*, 24th September 1906. Note that some historians suggest that the revival of Liberal organisation after 1906 was not in fact uniform across the country; see for example, A. Howkins, 'Edwardian Liberalism and Industrial Unrest: A Class View of the Decline of Liberalism', *History Workshop Journal*, 4 (1977), p. 143. Russell also highlights how the Liberal's relative financial position remained weak not least because in many areas the party was heavily reliant upon an extremely small number of individuals for financial support. See A. K, Russell, *Liberal Landslide: The General Election of 1906* (Newton Abbot, 1973) p. 39. Clarke also identifies a similar situation in Lancashire; see P. Clarke, *Lancashire*, p. 213.

organised Labour had become a political force and must be recognised'.[5] Yet, a feature of both the Liberal and Labour campaigns was a relative neglect of labour questions and social reform.[6] Overwhelmingly, the most prominent issues for all candidates were Free Trade, education (opposition to the 1902 Education Act) and the question of Chinese Slavery in South Africa. These issues allowed both Liberal and Labour candidates to present themselves as concerned with moral, humanitarian as well as economic considerations, whilst at the same time recognising the freedom of the individual.

Of all of the city's constituencies, it was generally considered that Manchester North-West was one of the most important. Perceived to be the 'citadel' of Free-Trade, commerce and capital, it represented the heart of the cotton industry; Britain's largest export trade and one of its greatest wealth providers. Since 1885 the seat had been held by the Unionist Sir W. H. Houldsworth who had been unopposed in 1900. It was widely believed that the rejection of a Unionist here would have an 'immense effect upon other constituencies'.[7] The constituency was a large one with nearly 12,000 voters and although it had an image as a business constituency it was in fact mixed in its social and economic composition. Certainly, it included some of the richest men in the country (mainly non- resident voters who qualified through their businesses in the division) but it also included a very sizable number of urban poor and significant Irish and Jewish communities. The Liberal candidate in Manchester North-West in 1906 was Winston Churchill who had joined the party two years earlier in protest over the Tariff Reform issue. Churchill (just 32 years of age at the time) had represented the nearby Lancashire constituency of Oldham from 1900 and was perceived to be a rising star in British politics. Throughout the 1906 contest, local commentators reported that Churchill's campaign was conducted with considerably more energy and enthusiasm than was usual. Churchill was publicly supported by many of the division's most prominent businessmen (of all party persuasions) primarily on the basis of their objection to an alteration in fiscal policy. Churchill's opponent was a London barrister, William Joynson-Hicks. In contrast to Churchill's exuberant

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[5] *Manchester Evening News*, 5th January 1906.
[6] Nationally, two-thirds of candidates included social reform proposals in their election addresses, see Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, p. 66. Russell notes that candidates who did give some priority to social reform tended to be younger.
[7] *Manchester Guardian*, 12th January 1906.

platform performances, Joynson-Hicks (at least according to the Liberal press) appeared somewhat dull in comparison. He presented himself (essentially) as a defender of the status quo and paid most attention to the issue of the union. For the *Manchester Guardian*, however, this appeared to be a flawed tactic since it was assumed that the North-West voters cared little about the 'Home Rule bogey'.[8] In a division so heavily influenced by commercial interests, the most crucial issue remained the fiscal question and the possible impact an introduction of protection would have upon the cotton trade. Churchill's capable advocacy of the virtues of Free Trade proved to be a Godsend to the Liberal campaign in this important division. Of course, Churchill possessed a gift with words and avoided becoming submerged in the technicalities of the issue and simply asked 'if Free Trade is not a good thing, why did you build the Manchester ship canal? ...what is the good of constructing it to make the delivery of goods as cheap as possible if you are going to put customs officers on duty to place a tax on them before they reach you? You might as well throw your money into the canal'.[9] These sentiments were bound to go down well in the city where the cult of Cobden and Bright had reached quasi-religious proportions. It is important to note, however, that Free Trade was not a subject exclusively of interest to the commercial classes and business elite; for the working-classes the matter was a 'bread and butter' question and any suggestion that their material well-being might be unduly affected by a reversal in policy could prove to be decisive for many of these voters. In areas such as North-West Manchester large parts of the industrial working-classes might have therefore supported the Liberal Party not because of any particular political or cultural identification to the party but because at particular times it was perceived to be more economically advisable to do so.

The Tariff Reform issue must have at times appeared an incredibly complicated and confusing debate for the average elector. Confronted with an array of complex economic arguments and propositions which suggested both Free Trade and some form of Protection offered the best chance for securing economic stability, protect jobs and guarantee low food prices, how could they determine which to believe? In 1906 Joynson-Hicks regularly told electors that the maintenance of the existing

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[8] *Manchester Guardian*, 5th January 1906.
[9] See Churchill speech, *Manchester Guardian*, 10th January 1906.

system would lead to increased unemployment.[10] Churchill challenged this proposition by suggesting that it was rather the late government's unnecessary and wasteful expenditure which contributed more than anything else to economic instability. As all Liberal candidates did, Churchill argued that Chamberlain's proposals would lead to retaliation and economic disaster.

Churchill's ability to explain the basic aspects of Tariff Reform in simple terms was an electoral asset for the Liberal Party in Manchester throughout the campaign. Although, whilst his platform performances lifted the spirits of Liberals they clearly provoked consternation from his former Conservative associates who believed he was simply courting 'cheap notoriety'; as one Unionist supporter writing to the *Manchester Courier* expressed 'whilst we admire talent from whatever source, we would prefer it blended with modesty rather than precocity and calm language rather than vituperation'.[11]

The Unionist advocacy of Tariff Reform in large part represented a direct appeal to working-class self-interest since it was argued imperial preference would secure jobs by protecting British trade against foreign competition. Yet there was one obvious flaw with this strategy; as a leading historian of the Tariff Reform issue suggests, it was not perceived to be an attractive policy outside the region of its birth (the Midlands) so ultimately it proved to be an 'even more disastrous policy' in the regions where trade was principally export-led.[12] Neither did the movement for Tariff Reform enjoy the widespread grass-roots support that Free-Trade did. In areas such as Manchester the movement to maintain Free-Trade amounted to a coherent and well organised campaign. Neither was Tariff Reform supported by the majority of trade unionists, as Savage concludes; in one fell swoop the Unionists 'lost their credibility as the party of the economic interests of the workers'.[13] This is a critical point to bear in mind when considering cities such as Manchester which possessed both significant

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[10] Joynson-Hick's explanation of how Protection would eradicate unemployment appeared highly complicated and he possibly made matters worse by arguing that the erection of tariff barriers would widen the total area of Free Trade. By this, of course, he meant within the empire, but his suggestion that Protection meant more Free Trade was reported to have not been well received by audiences and he was advised by his campaign managers to avoid the subject, *Manchester Guardian* 6th January 1906.
[11] *Manchester Courier*, 4th January 1906.
[12] A. Sykes, *Tariff Reform in British Politics 1903-1913* (Oxford, 1979), p. 26. On Tariff Reform see also P. Fraser, 'Unionism and Tariff Reform: the crisis of 1906', *Historical Journal*, 5 (1962).
[13] See M. Savage. *Dynamics*, p. 148.

commercial interests and extensive working-class communities whose prosperity relied heavily on the fortunes of the cotton trade.

For symbolic value Manchester-East was another seat which the Liberal Party was desperate to capture in 1906. The constituency had been represented by Arthur Balfour for more than 20 years. In 1900 he had been returned with a majority of nearly two and a half thousand. That majority had been unusually high on the basis of support for the Boer War.[14] Manchester East was by no means a safe Unionist seat. Whilst no doubt Balfour attracted a certain degree of personal support in his constituency he also carried a huge burden of the unpopularity associated with the late Unionist administration and this was very much apparent throughout the 1906 campaign. Balfour was routinely heckled; on one occasion even having a herring thrown at him and the customary vote of confidence in his candidature at meetings was lost more often than it was supported [15]. Clearly, the mood had swung against Balfour and this was possibly exacerbated by his seemingly confused policy on Tariff Reform. The former prime minister clearly had no definite policy on the fiscal question. He even went so far as to inform voters that he would be 'ill performing my duties if I were to profess a settled conviction where none exists'.[16] In the opinion of one Liberal agent afterwards, Balfour's 'mystifying' election speeches simply made electors 'extremely indignant'.[17]

Across the whole of the city, the President of the Master Cotton Spinners Association, Charles Macara, was unusually active throughout the campaign in his condemnation of any form of Tariff Reform. The Association issued a wide array of pamphlets and circulars advising voters that any alteration of existing arrangements would be 'bad for the cotton industry and the consumer alike'.[18] The 1906 general election also saw

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[14] Previous contests had seen Balfour obtain relatively small majorities and had even been as low as 398.

[15] *Manchester Guardian*, 10th January 1906. The 1906 general election was perceived to be a particularly ill-natured contest. The press across the country reported a discernable increase in instances of disorder at meetings and the Unionist candidates in particular were at the receiving end of much abuse; see A. K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, pp. 130-131.

[16] See Balfour's speech, *Election Speaker (East Manchester edition)*, January 1906.

[17] See Zimmerman's post election assessment, *Manchester Guardian*, 15th January 1906.

[18] *Manchester Guardian*, 10th January 1906.

the formation of the Manchester Free Trade League.[19]Although this was ostensibly a non-party organisation the Free Trade League (hereafter FTL) was extremely active and influential in the Liberal Party's anti-Tariff Reform campaign throughout the 1906 contest. Significantly, the Manchester FTL also included a large number of the city's most prominent Conservatives (a point not lost upon either Liberal organisers or the Liberal press nationally and locally).

Balfour's Liberal opponent (Thomas Horridge) worked exhaustively throughout the campaign. Together with his wife, it was estimated he had canvassed over three hundred homes per day (on top of the huge number of meetings he addressed). Horridge's central planks were Free Trade, Chinese Slavery and the Trades Disputes Act. East Manchester (which included Ardwick) was a major centre of the railway industry which employed large numbers of men in the area. Balfour's voting record in connection to the Trades Disputes Act had been ominous and no doubt was likely to lose him support from amongst this group of workers in particular. Manchester East also possessed areas of extreme poverty, especially the area bordering the city centre (Ancoats and Ardwick).[20] Liberal suggestions that Tariff Reform would lead to higher taxes on essential foodstuffs (tea and sugar especially) and contribute to rising unemployment probably proved significant in Balfour's declining popularity in his constituency. Furthermore, whilst anecdotal, the contemporary press suggested that the (long-term) influence of the brewers in this particular district had also been declining in the years leading up to 1906.[21] The licensed trade had always thrown their weight behind Conservatism (as it continued to do so) and had been an enormous influence on the extent of popular Conservatism in some places. Of significance in East Manchester in 1906 was a strong co-operation between the local Liberal Association and the LRC. After the contest Horridge's agent remarked that the Liberal organisation had 'put themselves into full and sympathetic line with Labour' and he believed support for labour representation was the 'foundation of modern Liberalism'.[22] The question of Chinese Slavery (one which had been pushed very hard in this division) also appealed to the 'labour' interest; the rights of the Chinese

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[19] The Free Trade Union (later League) had been formed nationally in July 1903 in response to Chamberlain's campaign for imperial preference. See P. Barberis, M. Tyldesley and J. McHugh (eds.) *Dictionary of Political Organisations* (London, 2000), p. 306.
[20] See A. Kidd, *Manchester*, pp. 120-123.
[21] This was the opinion of the local Liberal press; see *Manchester Evening News*, 10th January 1906.
[22] *Manchester Evening News*, 10th January 1906.

labourer (it was suggested) was a question connected to the rights of labour more generally.[23]

South Manchester was the largest constituency in the city (with nearly fifteen thousand electors) and up to 1895 it had always returned a Liberal member. This predominantly suburban division of the city included the middle-class enclave of Moss Side and it was generally felt that this district determined the results of the whole constituency. A large number of Moss Side's residents worked in the textile warehouses on the Whitworth Street corridor. The *Manchester Guardian* believed these workers to be 'typically progressive'.[24] Indeed, the Liberal candidate, Arthur Haworth, was on the radical side of his party and at the beginning of the twentieth century was one of Manchester's most radical Liberals. Haworth came from a well-known local Liberal family and was a central figure in the Manchester Liberal Federation. Interestingly, he was the only out-and-out (evangelical) nonconformist among the Liberal candidates. During the 1906 campaign he inevitably focused on aspects of policy perceived to affect the nonconformist interest.[25] Throughout the 1906 contest Haworth was one of the city's strongest advocates of sympathetic trade union legislation. He fervently argued for state subsidies for the unemployed; ones which did not result in the 'taint of pauperism and electoral disqualification'.[26] He also made land reform another central plank of his campaign arguing that the 'unearned increment in urban sites ought to bear its fair share of the burden of the rates'.[27] Additionally, whereas most of the city's other Liberal candidates tended to avoid the question of Irish Home Rule, Haworth chose to discuss the issue in great detail.[28]

According to the local Liberal press, a noticeable feature of the 1906 general election contests in Manchester was an apparent weakness of Unionist organisation and somewhat ineffective candidates. In South Manchester, in particular, the *Manchester Evening News* reported that the Unionist rank and file did not give 'whole-hearted

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[23] See *Election Speaker (East Manchester edition)*, January 1906.
[24] *Manchester Guardian*, 13th January 1906.
[25] See also S. Koss, 'Revival and Revivalism' in A. J. A. Morris (ed) *Edwardian Radicalism 1900-1914: Aspects of British Radicalism* (London and Boston, 1974), p.91.
[26] *Manchester Guardian*, 1st January 1906.
[27] Ibid.
[28] *Manchester Evening News*, 12th January 1912.

support' to their candidate.[29] The extent to which this was the case remains uncertain but the fact that it had even been reported may have damaged the Unionist's prospects.

The last constituency to be contested by the Liberals was Manchester's only seat currently held by the party; Manchester North. Manchester North was a largely working-class constituency. Charles Schwann had represented the division since 1886 and enjoyed considerable local support. Manchester North was overwhelmingly working-class and organised labour here threw its weight behind the Liberal Party. During the 1906 campaign Schwann received the public support of both the railway and post office workers. The Unionist candidate, Sowler, also gave considerable attention to the question of trade unionism declaring that he was in favour of the Trades Dispute Bill although he qualified his position by adding that whilst he believed that the unions 'should have liberty' they 'should not mistake that for licence' which might not have given the impression of wholehearted support[30] The Unionist candidate also focused heavily on education claiming that if the Liberals were elected they would 'endeavour to take away the discretion of parents [in respect to] the religious beliefs they would have taught their children'.[31]

The LRC contested two seats in Manchester in 1906. Both of these were in areas where historically popular Conservatism had a significant influence for large parts of these predominantly working-class communities.[32] Manchester North-East had been held by the Unionist member, Sir James Fergusson since 1885. He was so sure of retaining his seat that he did not feel it necessary to campaign at all during the 1906 general election. Throughout the entire campaign he attended just four meetings although he might have been put off since, according to the *Manchester Evening News,* two of these were of a particularly hostile character.[33] On one occasion he even refused to continue. It was believed that Unionist organisation was rather weak in this

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[29] *Manchester Evening News*, 13th January 1906.
[30] *Manchester Courier*, 13th January 1906.
[31] *Manchester Courier*, 10th January 1906.
[32] This, however, did not manifest (to any great extent) in terms of organised popular Conservatism, notably membership of the Primrose League, which remained extremely small in even these parts of Manchester, see, M. Pugh, *The Tories and the People*, (Oxford, 1985), p. 123.
[33] *Manchester Evening News*, 12th January 1906.

constituency and in 1906 there were fewer party workers than at previous contests.[34] Ultimately, it seems that the Unionists put little effort into the contest in this part of the city.

Manchester North-East was one of the city's poorest districts leading one shocked Edwardian observer to report of the 'reek and stench... gloom and grime...squalor and misery of this corner of hell' and to conclude 'what an appalling price Manchester pays for it's prosperity'.[35] Indeed, the price was very high. Areas such as Ancoats and Miles Platting in particular contained poverty which had changed relatively little since Engels had so vividly described the area in the 1840s. It was upon the extent of deplorable poverty that the Labour Party candidate, J R Clynes, chose to focus some of his campaign. Clynes would become one of Labour's most important early politicians as a government minister during the First World War. In 1906, he was thirty-five years old. A former mill worker Clynes had become a prominent local trade unionist in the Gas Workers and Boilermakers Union. Whilst Clynes did not necessarily hide his socialist beliefs, he remained cautious not to overstate them and articulated a moderate (Liberal) programme. Throughout the 1906 campaign Clynes received the official support of a number of locally important groups including the Free Trade League, the United Irish League and the General Railway Workers Union. As an official LRC candidate Clynes was not expected to ask the local Liberals for assistance although various resolutions in support of Clynes were passed by the East Manchester Liberal Association who published a number of pamphlets and advertisement hoardings.

Besides a direct appeal to the industrial working-classes, Clynes also targeted middle-class electors in the division, in particular shopkeepers and other small traders. In one speech he suggested that Labour did not expect their support for altruistic reasons but 'for the sake of their own pockets'.[36] Similar to the Liberal candidates, Clynes' basic

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[34]From the few addresses that Ferguson delivered it seems his basic position was that he was 'entirely against a resort to Protection [but believed] it was the duty of the Government to do that which Mr Balfour recommended'. He identified areas in which workers rights had been greatly strengthened by the late Government (factory and mining laws, workmen's compensation and the Conciliation Act) and argued state aid for the unemployed would result in a 'great loss to the state'. *Manchester Courier*, 10th January 1906.

[35] *Labour Leader*, 21st January 1910.

[36] *Manchester Evening News*, 8th January 1906.

proposition was that all had suffered in consequence of the late Unionist Government (mainly owing to its wayward fiscal policy) and if they were to be returned again, the people would continue to endure economic hardship.

As has been seen, in Manchester, as elsewhere, the 1906 election was fought on the record of the late government which, of course, parliamentary elections generally are. But it is important to recognise that, irrespective of the legislation that followed 1906, the election itself (as analysis of Manchester illustrates) lacked the articulation of distinctly new ideas apart from rare exceptions such as Haworth in South Manchester. There was, in fact, little to distinguish Labour's programme from that of official Liberalism principally because they appeared to be at such pains to present themselves as Free Trade candidates. Consequently, this helps to explain why the Liberals appeared not to be alarmed by the Labour Party. Some writers have suggested that the Labour Party was more committed and united in relation to its social welfare policy compared to the Liberals who remained divided on the issue and made few specific reform proposals.[37] The evidence in Manchester suggests that this depiction was largely, but not entirely, accurate. As has been seen, the city's Liberal candidates (with the exception of Haworth) did not make social reform a major issue throughout their campaigns. Similarly, the Labour candidates placed surprisingly little emphasis on social reform during the 1906 campaign. Whilst their election addresses mentioned aspects such as the Unemployed Workmen Act, Old Age Pensions, housing and taxation throughout the campaign itself neither Labour candidate paid special attention to such issues and no detail as to Labour's approach was forthcoming.[38] Perhaps this was simply a question of the LRC candidates playing it safe, wishing not to appear too radical at early parliamentary attempts.

As noted above, one of the greatest difficulties for the Labour Party at this stage was limited organisation.[39] Whilst the party may have not been so disadvantaged during the 1906 election itself (since most of the LRC's candidates received assistance from

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[37] See Thane, P. 'The Labour Party and State Welfare' in K. D. Brown, *The First Labour Party*, London, 1985), p. 183 and J. Harris, *Unemployment and Politics: A Study in English Social Policy 1886-1914*, (London, 1985), p. 186.

[38] It should be noted that the LRC issued a collective policy statement alongside the candidates' own individual statements.

[39] Labour weakness in respect of organisation has been identified in a number of localities; see for example, M. Savage, *Dynamics*, p. 157 and p. 60.

the local Liberals Associations), the greater problem was that Labour lacked permanent ward organisation in any of the Manchester constituencies and undertook hardly any preparatory work.[40] This was most noticeable in registration work such as tracking down removals. Whilst the established parties usually undertook three or more surveys, Labour had not been able to conduct any in 1906. Neither did the LRC possess the necessary funds for the adequate provision of agents. In 1906, for example, Clynes and Kelley (the LRC candidate in Manchester South West) shared the same election agent, Harry Nuttall, whose task was consequently enormous, as it was for his workers.

The other constituency in the city which saw a LRC candidate in 1906 was that of Manchester South-West. Geographically the smallest constituency in England and Manchester's smallest division in terms of population (with just 8,500 voters) Manchester South-West was an extremely compact working-class division although it also incorporated the exceptionally poor area of Hulme and also possessed a relatively high concentration of Roman Catholics. The fact that it was so small served perhaps to intensify the fierceness of electoral contests there. The seat had been held by the Liberal Party until 1895 when it was captured by the sitting Unionist MP, W. J. Galloway. Labour's candidate, George Kelley was a 58 year old former lithographic printer, well-known trade unionist and Manchester City Councillor.[41] Kelley was an interesting and emblematic political figure for this period who maintained a strong attachment to Liberalism. Some Labour radicals did not hide that they believed him to be a 'Lib-Lab wobbler'. *The Clarion* adopted a particularly harsh view of such candidates claiming they had only managed to secure election on the 'flowing Liberal tide' and confidently foresaw they would, however, find themselves 'washed up by the ebb'.[42] The *Labour Leader* also bemoaned the fact that for candidates such as Kelley 'the claims of Labour had been subordinate to the interests of Liberalism' adding that he had only secured the support of the United Irish League because 'he was punishing some staunch anti-Home Ruler'.[43] Of course, as an official LRC candidate George Kelley was expected not to seek Liberal assistance. Nonetheless, the South-West Manchester Liberal Association provided valuable support via repeated

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[40] See previous footnote.
[41] *Liberal Yearbook*, 1907.
[42] *The Clarion*, 19th January 1906.
[43] *Labour Leader*, 5th January 1906.

appeals in the press and the distribution of circulars and pamphlets as well as advertisements on hoardings across the constituency.

As the first day of polling arrived few people doubted that the Liberal Party would win the election although predictions varied as to the likely scale of a Liberal victory.[44] The period after 1902 had seen the Unionist Government stumbling from one crisis to another. The fact that much of the press were already discussing a Liberal victory might also have served to influence the result in itself. There had been a slight worry for some Liberals about the appearance of the Home Rule question and certainly most of the Liberal (and Labour) candidates in Manchester were cautious not to promote this issue too much. Of course, the Irish vote would remain securely behind the Liberals (and Labour candidates) irrespective of whether the candidates promoted Home Rule or not. There was no tactical advantage, therefore, in giving it any greater prominence than was absolutely necessary.

It is often contended that religious nonconformity was at the pinnacle of its political influence at the turn of the twentieth century. Whilst nonconformity had always been a major component of Liberal political campaigns, as Koss suggests, during 1906, however, it acquired an 'unprecedented dynamism' which infused this particular campaign with a 'moral fervour' and 'evangelical appeal' which proved powerful. Virtually every issue was espoused within the context of the nonconformist conscience.[45] Yet, as has been seen, in Manchester, whilst most issues may have been infused with a certain moral fervour, the actual nonconformist dimension and context to these debates was extremely limited. This contrasts greatly to the other locality evaluated later. In Manchester, whilst a moral context to some issues was emphasised, the majority of candidates chose not to emphasis the religious (nonconformist) dimension.

In Manchester, aspects such as lingering consternation over the Boer War and trade union grievances figured prominently in the rising anti-Unionist tide and these factors contributed significantly to the Liberal's confidence and optimism. Another aspect

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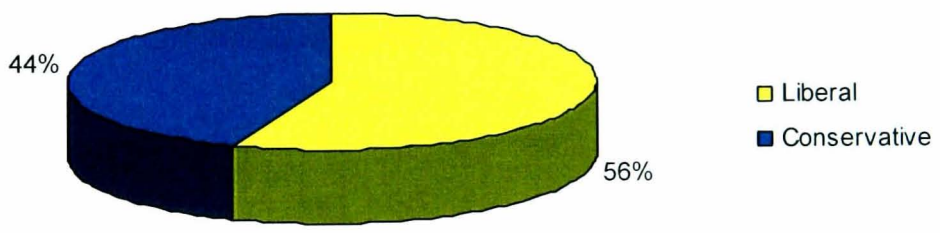
[44] A. K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, p. 145.
[45] For details on the 1906 election and nonconformity see Stephen K Koss, 'Revival and Revivalism', pp. 75-92.

aiding the Liberal Party in 1906 was a greater part played by women. As Russell suggests, women 'threw their weight more heavily on to the Labour and Liberal side than at any time before' primarily because of the Free Trade v Protection debate and the cheap food issue. [46] Of course, this had been *the* dominant issue in the majority of Manchester's constituencies. The *Manchester Guardian* suggested that 'a candidate had only to be a Free-Trader to get in, whether he was known or unknown, semi-Unionist or thorough Home-Ruler, Protestant or Catholic, entertaining or dull [but] he had only to be a Protectionist to lose all chance of getting in.'[47] To a very great extent this was true, although this is not to suggest the Liberal campaigns in all constituencies rested exclusively on this one aspect. Arthur Haworth in South Manchester conducted an extremely thoughtful, wide ranging and 'progressive' campaign.

1906 General Election in Manchester: Results and Analysis[48]

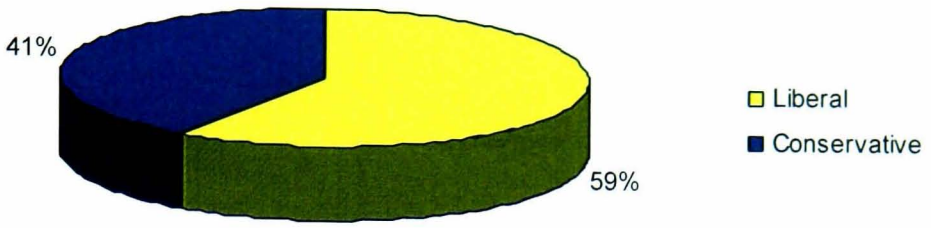
Fig. 1 Manchester North-West (Turnout 88%)



Seat uncontested in 1900

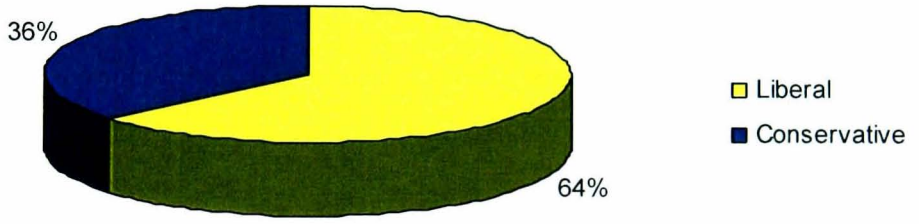
[46] See A. K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, p. 176. Russell acknowledges that the WSPU campaigned actively against Churchill in North-West Manchester but concludes that, ultimately, fears concerning food prices had the greatest impact.
[47] *Manchester Guardian*, 15th January 1906.
[48] Note that these figures have been rounded up or down.

Fig. 2 Manchester East (Turnout 85.1%)



22.5% swing from Conservative to Liberal[49]

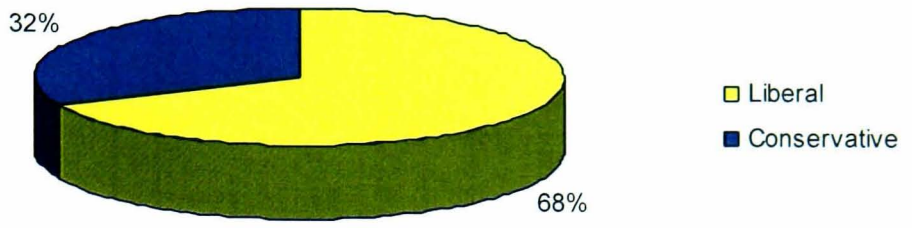
Fig. 3 Manchester North (Turnout 84.5%)



13.5% swing from Conservative to Liberal

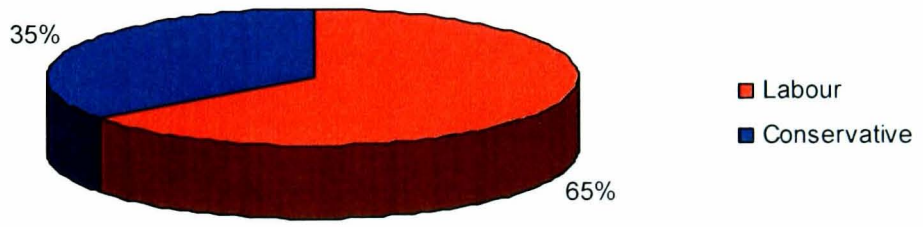
[49] Swing figures have been calculated using the Butler method of measurement; see D. Butler and S. Van Beek, 'Why Not Swing? Measuring Electoral Change', *Political Science and Politics*, 23, 2 (June, 1990), pp. 178-184.

Fig. 4 Manchester South (Turnout 82.8%)



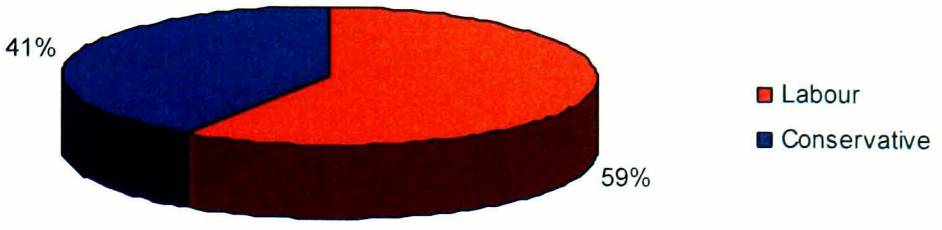
25.1% swing Liberal Unionist to Liberal

Fig. 5 Manchester North-East (Turnout 86%)



Seat uncontested by Labour in 1900

Fig. 6 Manchester South-West (Turnout 81.6%)



21.4% swing Conservative to Labour

The North West division saw the Liberal Party returned with a majority of 1,241 on the highest turnout since 1884 (see fig. 1). In the neighbouring division of East Manchester (see fig. 2) the former Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour, was decisively rejected, the Liberals winning with a majority of nearly 2000. In his own constituency, as across the country as a whole, Balfour and his party had severely underestimated the impact of issues such as Tariff Reform, the Education Act and Chinese slavery. Manchester North and South (see figs. 3 and 4) saw equally impressive Liberal victories. In the former, the veteran member Charles Schwann saw his majority increase from just 26 (in 1900) to nearly 2,500[50] and Arthur Haworth's victory in the latter constituted the Liberal's most impressive victory in Manchester, his majority of 4,232 represented 68% share of the vote. In Manchester North East and South West (see fig. 5 and 6) both Labour's candidates were elected, Clynes with a majority of 2,432 (29.2%) and Kelley with 1,226 (17.6%). The *Manchester Guardian* believed that Labour's success had been facilitated in large measure by high levels of support from four distinct groups: new voters, Labour supporters, Liberals and dissatisfied Conservatives (defecting principally over Free Trade).[51] Interestingly, the *Manchester Guardian* also suggested that Conservative voters had also switched allegiance because they felt 'direct representation of labour was a cause more important to them than ordinary party considerations'.[52] Indeed, nationwide Labour

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[50] The Liberal share of the vote was 63.7%.
[51] An unusually high number of removals in the constituency may have contributed towards a higher than average percentage of new voters although the *Manchester Guardian* did not indicate why they felt this had aided the Labour cause. *Manchester Guardian*, 12th January 1906.
[52] Ibid.

achieved an average swing of 16.8% from the Unionists, nearly twice the average of 9.4% from Unionist to Liberal.[53] Labour was winning over Conservative working-class voters in the way the *Manchester Guardian* suggested it might be expected that Labour would retain this new support at both municipal and parliamentary level; whether this materialised will be considered in subsequent discussion of Manchester's electoral development.

After the contest Clynes seems to have been anxious to impress that he believed Labour had won on a distinctly different agenda to the established parties; he told the *Manchester Guardian,* that he had been keen to promote the idea of a 'big Labour party that could decide legislation and be a determining influence on national policy'.[54] Outlining the reasons for his success Clynes told *The Clarion* that he believed a crucial factor had been 'the spread of Labour opinions' although he conceded that other 'temporary issues like Chinese slavery and Free Trade had all helped'.[55] As we can see, however, the extent to which Clynes actually articulated a distinctive Labour agenda is open to question. Of course, newspapers such as the *Manchester Guardian* might be expected to emphasise the more 'Liberal' aspects of a Labour candidate's platform, yet, even so, careful reading of Clyne's addresses across an array of sources, however, suggests that Clynes (and Labour more generally) lacked a particularly distinctive appeal. This does not mean that there was a complete absence of 'labour' issues and, indeed, Liberal candidates also profited from these (as they continued to after 1906) but had the Free Trade issue been less prominent, there remains some uncertainty as to whether the fledgling Labour Party could have won this seat quite so easily. Manchester South-West also saw a significant Labour victory, with George Kelley winning the seat with a majority of 1,226 on a turnout of 81.6%. Labour attained 64.6.8% of the vote (much more than in Manchester North-East). In 1900 the Unionists had won the seat with 62.6% of the popular vote. Kelley enthused that his victory represented a 'blow struck at that shade of political thought which was not favourable to the workers'.[56]

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[53] A. K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide,* p. 200.
[54] See Clynes interview with the *Manchester Guardian*, 15th January 1906.
[55] See *The Clarion*, 26th January 1906.
[56] *Manchester Guardian*, 15th January 1906.

Analysis of the 1906 general election in Manchester suggests that issues such as Free Trade, repeal of the Taff Vale Judgment, education and ethical questions (such as Chinese Slavery) were critical in pushing the Liberals and Labour together in an anti-Conservative alliance and the election resulted in a progressive landslide which, given the city's history, represented a significant shift in its electoral politics. These were all national issues and campaigns around the country had focused on the same themes. Nonetheless, the impact of place was significant in that the introduction of Tariff Reform into the political debate in Manchester, more than anything else, enabled the Liberal and Labour candidates to make a direct appeal to the city's electors on an issue which had by that time become almost an article of faith for both rich and poor. The 'progressive' candidates' constant re-iteration of the certain ill-effects (as they claimed) of any form of fiscal reform undoubtedly left many voters with little choice but to vote Liberal or Labour irrespective of previous party loyalty. The extent to which the progressive parties would be able to retain such support was yet to be seen.

2.2: The 1908 North West Manchester By-Election

By the beginning of the twentieth century by-elections had become an increasingly important and visible feature of British politics; a growing popular press ensured such contests attracted considerable attention, generating both local and national interest. A number of historians have concluded that by-election performance before 1914 suggests a shift away from the Liberal Party.[57] Detailed consideration of by-elections in Manchester before the outbreak of war in 1914 does not suggest that there was a fundamental crisis for the Liberal Party at that time; arguably the Liberals were performing impressively, especially when set against the backdrop of the scale of forces ranged against them as a result of various unpopular pieces of government legislation. Although the Liberals did lose seats to the Conservatives; elsewhere, the Liberals retained seats with an increased share of the vote. Many of these had also been in triangular contests (where Labour had stood). Even in seats which the Liberals lost, the party often still managed to increase its share of the vote. On no occasion did the Labour Party do better than the Liberals in a three-cornered contest before 1914; in every instance the Labour candidate came bottom of the poll. Before the outbreak of war in 1914 there were a number of by-elections in the North-West of England and

[57] R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, pp. 82-7.

these provide a valuable insight into the problems the Liberal and Labour Parties faced during this period.

With elevation to the cabinet Winston Churchill was in 1908 required to resign his seat and stand in a by-election.[58] The sitting member would usually be returned unopposed but Unionist determination to recapture this important division made it unlikely such an opportunity would be allowed to pass. The 1908 contest in North-West Manchester represents an interesting by-election in the region before 1914. North-West Manchester was perceived by both main parties as being important to capture; the constituency had acquired a reputation as one which influenced the votes not only of the wider region but also the nation. It was believed that North-West Manchester possessed significance unlike any other in the country. Unsurprising, therefore, the 1908 by-election captivated the national press for the duration of the campaign.

In terms of class, ethnicity and political opinion North-West Manchester was a mixed constituency. It possessed some of Britain's richest men but also some of its poorest; it had a strong Jewish community (concentrated in areas such as Cheetham, Strangeways and Broughton) and a sizable Irish community. North-West Manchester contained a strong presence of Unionist Free-Traders who (it was widely understood) put the issue of Free Trade before party identifications.[59] The division included nearly 12,000 voters split into eight wards; the largest of these was Cheetham with 3,840 voters. Within the very heart of the city, Exchange and St. Anns were very rich wards in rateable value and represented the centre of the Lancashire cotton trade. Prior to 1906 the constituency had never returned a Liberal and despite the Liberal Party's success in 1906 there was some uncertainty as to the exact political character of the division. The *Liberal Magazine,* for example, believed that 'in no other constituency [had] so many Unionists voted Liberal without becoming Liberal'.[60] Essentially, many perceived that the Liberal Party had only won in 1906 on the basis of the Free Trade question since the commercial element of the electorate strongly believed the

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[58] See *Manchester Guardian*, 10th April 1908. The Re-election of Ministers Act ended this requirement in 1926.
[59] See *Liberal Magazine*, May 1908.
[60] Ibid.

future of the cotton industry depended on it. They had voted Liberal in 1906 exclusively on this issue.

As in 1906 Churchill's opponent in 1908 was the local barrister, philanthropist and well-known temperance reformer, William Joynson Hicks.[61] In his opening address Churchill sought to emphasise the importance of the contest for the country as a whole, not least because, as he perceived it, a Unionist victory would 'encourage the House of Lords to greater excesses of partisanship'.[62] Churchill hoped the working man would not 'support six hundred peers over and above the wishes of six million electors'[63] although the principle focus of Churchill's campaign was Tariff Reform. Joynson-Hicks chose to avoid the subject of Tariff Reform, however, and instead focused on issues such as education and Chinese Slavery.

The 1908 by-election also saw a Socialist candidate. The decision of the Social Democrat's conference to send Dan Irving to fight North-West Manchester initiated considerable debate within Labour's ranks. Keir Hardie remained resolute that he would have voted against the decision, saying that whilst he generally favoured an increase in the number of socialist candidates, circumstances in Manchester were not favourable on this occasion. Moreover, he believed that such a campaign was likely to be detrimental to the Labour cause, claiming that it would be a 'fiasco' and thereby give a 'false impression as to the real strength of the Socialist movement'. Consequently it could 'injure the prospects of reasonable candidates elsewhere [and ultimately] damage the realisation of socialism nationally'.[64] Neither of Manchester's Labour MPs supported Irving's campaign. Both Clynes and Kelly appeared to share Hardie's view and so refused to uphold the candidature of someone who represented an organisation which, as they saw it, did not accept the 'unity and common cause of the united Labour Party'.[65] In terms of organisation the SDP was severely disadvantaged, Irving himself admitting there was virtually no organisation in the

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[61] Joynson Hicks did not appear to be a hard-line temperance reformer, however, and he did not make the issue a central plank of his campaign during the by-election.
[62] *Manchester Guardian,* 16th April 1908.
[63] *Manchester Guardian*, 16th April 1908.
[64] See *Labour Leader*, 24th April 1908.
[65] *Manchester Guardian*, 16th March 1908.

division apart from a small Jewish branch[66] and that no preparations had been made beforehand. It was also significant that the Manchester and Salford Trades Council were unable to support Irving on the grounds that 'for the purpose of [the] election he was not a trade unionist'.[67]

Whilst it cannot be denied that the press (especially the *Manchester Guardian*) gave Irving ample coverage, it was generally recognised from the outset that his chances were exceedingly poor. In a constituency such as North-West Manchester with considerable commercial and business interests it was widely accepted that a socialist candidate would struggle to gain widespread support. Irving, however, believed the election offered a 'grand opportunity to make known the cause of socialism' and hoped he would be 'in the fight'.[68] Irving suffered from the familiar accusations of atheism and was particularly disadvantaged by the circulation of a pamphlet (ostensibly issued by the SDP) entitled 'Socialism: Christ the enemy of the human race'. The pamphlet caused uproar and the Bishop of Manchester even joined in the denunciation of it. The circular was, of course, denounced as fraudulent by Irving, Hyndman and the SDP and its origins remained unclear, but it almost certainly did considerable damage to Irving's prospects. The issues Irving focused upon were those of unemployment, nationalisation of industry, universal suffrage, secular education and maintenance for children, old age pensions and Irish Home Rule. All of Irving's meetings had to be held outdoors as the SDP had been unable to secure halls; his speeches were emotional and evangelical in tone and called upon voters to vote for their 'own emancipation and on behalf of the oppressed... success would encourage the struggling masses trampled under a soulless capitalism'.[69]

Churchill's campaign virtually ignored social reform altogether which might seem surprising in the wake of recent welfare legislation such as Old Age Pensions and the Children's Act. Churchill more or less exclusively concentrated on the issue of Free

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[66] Whilst Irving declared that he would not pander to the Jewish vote, he did, however, express his disapproval of naturalization fees and argued that, as taxpayers, Jews ought to be given the right to vote, see *Manchester Guardian*, 17th April 1908.
[67] Irving was a member of the Gas Workers and General Union which was affiliated to the MSTC. The council stated a technicality meant he was not a trade unionist. What this was is unclear. *Manchester Guardian*, 19th April 1908.
[68] *Manchester Guardian*, 13th April 1908.
[69] *Manchester Guardian*, 13th April 1908.

Trade leaving it to others in his party to discuss social reform. Making his first public appearance since his appointment as Chancellor, David Lloyd George came to Manchester in support of Churchill making a series of speeches. He launched a scathing attack upon 'monopoly and privilege' demanding a 'radical programme of social reform' and the need to 'redistribute wealth…fair play to the worker…a war on poverty and destitution'.[70] For the new Chancellor, social injustice represented a 'stain upon the flag and it was the duty of every man to put an end to it'.[71] Lloyd George stressed how the by-election had come at an especially opportune time allowing the people of the city to demonstrate a 'sense of community' and to show the government they were behind it in the quest for social progress.[72]

As with all by-elections during the early twentieth century the Manchester contest saw the participation of a remarkable array of pressure groups, each attempting to impress upon the candidates, press and public their respective causes. One of the first to gain some degree of attention was the suffragette movement. It should be noted, however, that compared to later years, their tactics were somewhat restrained. The question of female suffrage was a topical issue. The Women's Enfranchisement Bill had recently passed through its second reading in the House of Commons and the women's campaign was anxious to use the by-election as an opportunity to promote the women's case. In 1908 Manchester's suffragettes chose not to embark upon disruptive action but to leave Liberal meetings alone and provide 'counter attractions' including having their own meetings, distributing leaflets and appealing to candidates to outline their position. From the beginning of the contest all three candidates expressed their general support for the women's vote. Joynson-Hicks appeared more enthusiastic however, declaring that he believed women should possess the vote on equal terms as men.[73] He also addressed a wider range of issues as they affected women. One of these related to the hours of barmaids since there were current proposals to restrict their hours. Joynson-Hicks claimed he was opposed to any restrictions of women's labour.[74] Somewhat less tactfully, Churchill told voters that he 'didn't like to see

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[70] It was considered bad conduct for cabinet ministers to participate in by-election campaigns. The Unionists perceived the appearance of Lloyd George as a sign of desperation and argued it was inappropriate. *Manchester Guardian*, 22nd April 1908.
[71] *Manchester Guardian*, 22nd April 1908.
[72] Ibid.
[73] *Manchester Guardian*, 14th April 1908.
[74] *Manchester Guardian*, 16th April 1908.

women in bars anyway'.[75] These issues would have had limited impact in themselves although issues surrounding the drink question might help mobilise key groups of voters for both parties, however, Churchill's attitude seemed emblematic; Joynson-Hicks appeared more sincere and more liberal. None of the candidates 'came up to the standard of requirement' for the women, however, and so neither was endorsed by either the WSPU or the NUWSS.

Other issues which achieved some prominence during the campaign included the eight hour day and workmen's compensation. For Churchill, the question of social advancement and Tariff Reform were inextricably connected and electors had a choice between 'progress and reaction'. He suggested that a proposal of Tariff Reform was essentially an attempt to 'reverse the social balance…to set back the clock and re-conquer the country for forces of capital and privilege'.[76] There was no question of the government being able to finance a scheme of old age pensions under a Protectionist system. For Churchill, everything came back to the question of the maintenance of Free Trade. His opponent, however, argued that the Eight Hours Bill was itself a clear infringement of the Free Trade principle and he told voters that this was something which had already been identified by the Chairman of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce (Tootal Broadhurst).[77] Broadhurst was also Chairman of the Manchester Free Trade Unionist Association and during the by-election endeavoured to organise large Free Trade meetings in support of Churchill although he was unable to generate any great enthusiasm. Joynson-Hicks also argued that the Eight Hours Bill would increase coal prices which, in turn, would add an even greater burden on the cotton industry. Joynson-Hicks claimed it was unfortunate that Churchill had supported the Bill 'in the imaginary interest of a million miners to the detriment of about forty three million people'[78] and in his closing speech he launched a ferocious assault on the Liberal government on a number of aspects, proclaiming it had alienated the colonies, weakened the navy, increased taxation, flouted religious convictions and 'let loose chaos and bloodshed in Ireland'.[79] Overall, Joynson-Hicks conducted a broader campaign (than Churchill) and for tactical reasons he had chosen

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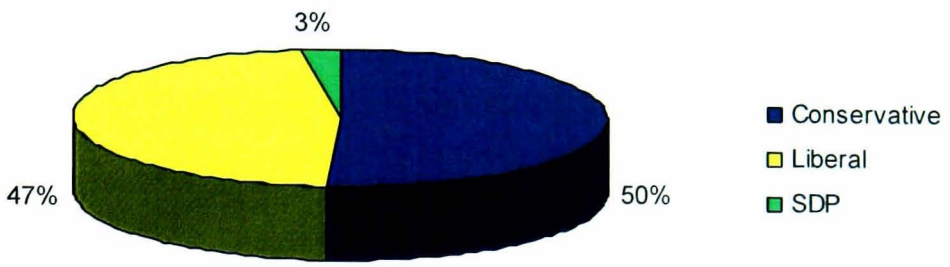
[75] *Manchester Courier*, 16th April 1908.
[76] *Manchester Guardian*, 16th April 1908.
[77] *Manchester Guardian*, 20th April, 1908.
[78] *Manchester Guardian*, 20th April 1908.
[79] See *Manchester Courier*, 24th April 1908.

not to fight the by-election campaign on the fiscal question although in his election address he identified himself as a Tariff Reformer.[80]

1908 Manchester North-West By-Election Result

Fig.7 (Turnout 89.7%)



8.2% swing Liberal to Conservative

The result of the by-election saw the Unionists recapturing North-West Manchester with a relatively small majority of 429. Given the constituency's electoral history this did not represent a substantial reversal for the Liberal Party. The Unionist's majority had been nearly 1,500 (a 17% margin of the total vote) in 1895 and the Liberals had not considered the seat worth contesting in either the 1892 or 1900 general elections. The Liberals may have recently come to consider this constituency the most famous Free Trade seat in England and might claim it ought to be naturally Liberal, the reality, however, was less straightforward.

The contemporary press had some difficulty in interpreting the result. For some sections of the Liberal press it represented a 'heavy setback for the cause of progress… an unmerited reverse for the government… and an absolutely disastrous blow for Free Trade'.[81] For others, the wonder was not Churchill's 1908 defeat but his victory in 1906.[82] That the Unionist candidate had decided to avoid the fiscal issue caused some degree of resentment across the Liberal press; the *Daily News* bemoaned

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[80] Published on April 13th 1908 Hick's election address stated that he would advocate at length the party's Birmingham policy at a future General Election.
[81] *Morning Leader*, 25th April 1908.
[82] *Daily Chronicle*, 25th April 1908.

the fact that Joynson-Hicks had won 'a victory under obscure colours'.[83] Other newspapers simply perceived that with Catholics and the liquor trade raged against him, Churchill's defeat was ultimately inevitable.[84] The Unionist press appeared equally divided. Some sections suggested that in making Free Trade the key issue of the by-election Churchill had 'staked all and lost'; the Manchester constituency most synonymous with Free Trade had given a firm endorsement for Tariff Reform.[85] Other sections of the Unionist press, including the *Manchester Courier,* took a more pragmatic view in arguing that the by-election was not primarily a victory for Tariff Reform because the candidate had not made it the immediate issue.[86] Indeed, it is doubtful that the result did have much to do with Free Trade at all. In his post-election address, Joynson-Hicks himself refused to cite Tariff Reform as a major reason for his victory, which he attributed instead to the 'absolute detestation on the part of the commercial and working classes of the current legislation of the present government'.[87] Lloyd George displayed a remarkable ability to emphasise only the positive when suggesting that 'the polling of only 150 more votes [for the Conservatives] than the aggregate forces of progress confirmed the necessity for the government to proceed with measures of social reform'.[88] Had Joynson-Hicks not avoided the Tariff Reform issue and made it a central plank of his campaign (as his party wished him to) some speculated his majority would have been even greater.[89] Churchill, however, had attempted to please everyone and in the process satisfied no-one as one regional newspaper expressed; Churchill had 'pandered to every clique that had a few votes to sell' and in the end had satisfied no-one.[90]

The 1908 by-election in Manchester suggests a number of factors relating to party strategy and performance. As has been seen, the Unionist candidate had determined to avoid the issue of Tariff Reform altogether and his position on the majority of issues appeared moderate, balanced and he clearly articulated his points effectively though the key to his success was most likely to have been his focused attacks on current

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[83] *Daily News*, 25th April 1908.
[84] *Bristol Mercury*, quoted in *Manchester Guardian*, 25th April 1908.
[85] *Bristol Times* and *Bristol Mercury* quoted in *Manchester Guardian* 25th April 1908.
[86] *Manchester Courier*, 25th April 1908.
[87] See *Manchester Courier*, 25th April 1908.
[88] *Manchester Guardian,* 27th April 1908.
[89] Acland Hood's position is cited in P. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, p. 287.
[90] *Nottingham Chronicle*, 25th April 1908 quoted in *Manchester Guardian*, 26th April 1908.

Liberal legislation. Equally, as analysis of the by-election illustrates, Churchill's campaign seemed somewhat weak by comparison. There are therefore a number of wider implications of the North-West by-election in Manchester. Firstly, by 1908 the Conservative Party had clearly come to recognise Tariff Reform as a serious electoral liability and so calculated that it was probably wise to avoid the issue (as best they could) during election campaigns. Conversely, the Liberals (as analysis of Churchill's campaign illustrates) continued somewhat dogmatically to focus on the fiscal issue. As an electoral strategy this may have been something of a flawed tactic however, given that by then it was clear that the Conservatives as a party were by no means united on Tariff Reform and it was not therefore guaranteed that an incoming Unionist administration would put such a policy into effect. Whilst it was understandable that in areas heavily reliant upon export trade (such as Manchester) the Liberals might continue to stress the benefits of Free Trade, it appears to have become unnecessary to exclusively focus campaigns on the subject. Secondly, whilst a few visiting speakers (David Lloyd George most notably) sought to emphasise the government's social reform programme, the candidate had not done so himself, suggesting that, at this stage at least, there was a significant extent of local (or candidate) autonomy where campaign issues were concerned.

Given the symbolic nature of the North-West constituency the 1908 by-election might have been perceived as a disaster for the Liberal Party. However, closer examination reveals that the Liberals had in fact polled respectably, obtaining 48% of the vote.[91] Ultimately, North-West Manchester had become a marginal constituency and the Liberal's strategy at the next contest would essentially be determined locally, yet the problem of how to go about this (in light of the declining significance of the Tariff Reform issue) had a greater national significance. For the historian, however, the key significance of the 1908 by-election is that whilst it undoubtedly represented a blow to the Liberals in Manchester, as indeed nationally given the reputation it had acquired, it did not indicate any major crisis for the party. [92]

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[91] One factor which ought to be noted in relation to the Liberal poll in North-West Manchester in 1908 was the Jewish vote. Given the Liberal Government's liberal administration of the religious persecution clause of the Aliens Act it was almost certainly the case that the Jewish vote was cast solidly for Churchill. This served to limit the swing at the by-election. For consideration of this aspect see J. Garrard, *The English and Immigration 1880-1910* (Oxford, 1970).

[92] To put the Manchester North-West result in national perspective, of the fifteen Liberal held seats which saw by-elections during 1908 the party managed to retain nine.

2.3: The 1910 General Elections in Manchester

In Manchester both the 1910 elections were fought primarily on the constitutional question by the Liberal and Labour parties, whilst Unionist candidates tended to focus their campaigns on other issues, particularly Irish Home Rule. A marked feature of the January contest was a reluctance of Unionists to engage in discussion on the constitutional question. For both the Liberal and Labour parties a key question would be to what extent the parliamentary gains of the 1906 general election would be retained? For the Liberal Party the 1910 contests produced somewhat mixed results in Manchester. They also demonstrated aspects of potential concern in relation to the position of the Labour Party in the city. As a result of the January 1910 election the city was represented by three Liberals, one Conservative and two Labour members. Whilst Manchester North-West had been regained the Liberals lost the South-West division in consequence of Labour intervention. Overall, however, the Liberal leadership deemed the results a further illustration that Manchester was 'emphatically against government by peer and beer'.[93] For the Labour Party, the January election also proved to be somewhat disappointing. As the *Labour Leader* reported 'the condition of the local organisations was in no manner capable of bearing the severe test of having to fight the machinery of two powerful parties'.[94] The same report went on to bemoan the 'deplorable lack of canvassers' and perhaps, more worryingly, a significant 'lack of contact between candidates and electors'.[95]

The January 1910 General Election in Manchester

The most significant aspect of the January 1910 general election in Manchester was that for the first time the Liberal and Labour parties opposed each other in a three-cornered contest.[96] Manchester thus sheds valuable light on the Progressive Alliance before 1914 and illustrates how at the constituency level, despite the existence of a theoretical 'alliance', relations could be far from harmonious. By 1909 the sitting members for two Manchester constituencies (East, held by Labour, and South West, by a Liberal) had stated their intention to retire at the dissolution of Parliament. In accordance with the spirit of the Progressive Alliance, the Liberals ought to have been

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[93] *Manchester Guardian*, 17th January 1910.
[94] *Labour Leader*, 4th February 1910.
[95] Ibid.
[96] The 1908 by-election had seen a three-cornered contest but the third candidate on that occasion had not been officially sanctioned by the Labour Party, rather, his candidature had not met with Labour approval. See previous section on 1908 by-election.

given a free run in East Manchester and Labour should have remained unopposed in South-West Manchester.[97] The Labour Party had come to the conclusion, however, that East Manchester was a seat that their own organisation ought to contest (largely on the basis that they had a strong organisation in the district and were doing well in municipal contests there) and so proceeded to adopt their own candidate, Manchester city councillor and miners' agent, John Sutton.[98] The Liberal Association was willing to accept this although on the condition that, in return, the Labour Party withdrew their candidate (J. M. McLachlan) in South-West Manchester.

The MLF undoubtedly strove hard to find a compromise solution but the East Manchester Liberal association had clearly resolved to make a serious challenge for the seat. This was reflected by the Association's choice of candidate; L.W. Zimmerman, who *The Times* reported was the 'strongest candidate the party could put forward'.[99] As a last resort the federation urged a deputation from the East Manchester Liberal Association that 'in the interests of Liberalism as a whole [they] ought to withdraw their candidate'.[100] The deputation replied there was 'no necessity to consider the matter further [since] they had unanimously decided to continue'.[101] The MLF could not do anything else but declare that the Association had, ultimately, 'placed upon themselves the responsibility of the contest'.[102] Eventually Zimmerman decided he no longer wished to continue and formally retired on 29th December thus resolving the issue in East Manchester.[103] The MLF, no doubt relieved, declared its 'high appreciation of [his] self-denial and self-sacrifice for the peoples cause'.[104] The episode is important for a number of reasons. Certainly, Labour did act as the aggressor by adopting McLachlan to contest South-West Manchester and this no doubt may have seemed ungracious to the local Liberals; the seat after all was held by them. The Federation's proposed solution seemed logical however. East Manchester

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[97] South-Manchester had a background of problems. In 1900, for example, although the Liberals did not run a candidate, the local association refused to endorse the LRC candidate.
[98] That the party was performing well in the municipal politics of this district (Bradford, Beswick and Ardwick wards in particular) may have confirmed for Labour their claim to contest the parliamentary constituency. See appendix for municipal election results in these areas.
[99] *The Times*, 17th December 1909. It was generally considered that Zimmerman had been instrumental in the 1906 election victories in Manchester and this made him a popular choice with the Liberal rank and file.
[100] *Manchester Liberal Federation Executive Committee Minutes*, 20th December 1909.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Zimmerman had clearly come to recognise his candidature would be a liability.
[104] *Manchester Liberal Federation Executive Committee Minutes*, 29th December 1909.

was an overwhelmingly working-class constituency and had never returned a Liberal before 1906; it was probably more Labour territory than Liberal. Furthermore, Sutton could be perceived to be a safe moderate candidate and would be unlikely to alienate traditionally Liberal voters. Sutton was certainly more acceptable to the MLF than Labour's candidate in South-West Manchester who was an out-and-out socialist. Manchester South-West, however, was a socially-mixed division and had previously returned Liberal members, so it made sense that this seat should be contested in the Liberal as opposed to the Labour interest. The consequences of this apparent breakdown in Liberal-Labour relations appeared clear to many contemporary observers, the *Manchester Courier* predicted that as 'negotiations had failed both of the progressive forces are faced with new dangers'.[105]

The smooth operation of the Liberal-Labour electoral agreement in 1906 had been a crucial factor in the overall results for both parties. It is important to recognise, however, that there had been some significant developments in respect of Lib-Lab relations after 1906 at the national level and it has been suggested by some historians that by 1910 Lib-Labism effectively ceased to be the viable alternative it had previously been. In large part, this was because its most powerful supporter (the miners) had gone over to Labour.[106] Blewett suggests that the lines between the Liberal and Labour Parties by 1910 were 'more clearly drawn'.[107] Yet, Lib-Lab sentiments remained strong amongst both political activists and sections of the electorate. This will be discussed further later. More significantly, and this was evidenced by the situation in South-West Manchester, attempts by the Labour Party to expand were clearly perceived by the Liberals as constituting acts of aggression. We should remember, however, that the Liberals clearly felt that the alliance was worth maintaining and so stood down in East Manchester; ultimately, Lib-Labism had not been seriously compromised despite some evident tension the episode had created.

The January 1910 General Election Campaign in Manchester South-West

Analysis of the January 1910 general election campaign in South-West Manchester demonstrates how Liberal-Labour relations were clearly fraught. McLachlan fought a

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[105] *Manchester Courier*, 5th January 1910.
[106] N. Blewett, *The Peers, The Parties and the People: The General Elections of 1910* (Toronto, 1972), pp. 234-235.
[107] Ibid, p. 234.

vigorous campaign and pulled no punches with regards to his hostility towards the Liberals who he claimed were 'the real enemies of the workers'.[108] In particular, he expressed his objection to the way the *Manchester Guardian* described Clynes as a Labour candidate yet himself as an Independent Socialist. Indeed, analysis of the electoral campaign demonstrates how the Liberal press did all it could to present McLachlan as a man undermining the unity of the Manchester's progressives forces.[109] The Liberal candidate, C. T. Needham, however, avoided blatant criticism of McLachlan although he did advise electors that a vote for Labour would be 'as good as a vote for the Unionists'.[110] The Unionist candidate in Manchester South-West was an out-and-out Tariff Reformer who directed most of his attention to attacking the Liberals on this question claiming that the House of Lords was a 'dead issue'.[111] The central planks of (the Conservative) Arthur Colefax's campaign were Tariff Reform and the Budget although he also addressed a wide range of social questions such as unemployment, pensions and education.[112] Colefax launched a fierce condemnation of the budget; his argument was essentially that the Chancellor's taxes were economically irrational and he went to great lengths to present figures in support of this assertion but, more significantly, he argued that the burden of taxation (following the Budget) would not fall heaviest upon the rich but rather the ordinary working man.[113] As he told one meeting, the Budget hit hardest 'the luxuries of the poor...whisky, tobacco and beer'.[114] Colefax was anxious to stress how he was 'fully in sympathy with the social reforms being advocated by the Liberal Party' but the critical question was how best to fund them and the answer lay with the fiscal question; he told one meeting that 'the Radicals' cried "never tax the foreigner" but he taxes you all the time...I say put some of your taxes on the foreigner'.[115] Colefax devoted considerable attention to demonstrating how British labour was 'exposed to

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[108] See *Manchester Guardian*, 3rd January 1910 and 6th January 1910.
[109] See *Manchester Guardian,* 4th January 1910 and *Labour Leader*, 21st January 1910.
[110] *Manchester Evening News*, 11th January 1910.
[111] Colefax's position was that the Unionists had not 'rejected the Budget but had simply referred it to the people', see *Manchester Courier*, 3rd January 1910.
[112] Colefax policies were remarkably progressive. He argued strongly for the removal of the pauper disqualification (incorporated within the Pensions scheme), advocated the establishment of a national scheme for unemployment and invalidity insurance, extension of the education system and state-aided purchase of land; see *Manchester Courier*, 8th January 1910 and 10th January 1910.
[113] See speeches in *Manchester Courier*, 3rd January 1910 and 6th January 1910.
[114] *Manchester Courier*, 6th January 1910.
[115] *Manchester Courier*, 5th January 1910.

unfair competition from abroad'.[116] Interestingly, Colefax never embarked upon a full-scale assault upon Labour, simply stating how he disagreed with McLachlan's approval of the socialisation of the means of production and abolition of the House of Lords. In fact Colefax stressed he was in agreement with many aspects of McLachlan's election address, in particular the need to address the distress and poverty caused by unemployment. Analysis of the electoral campaign suggests that the Conservatives conducted an exceptionally vigorous campaign in Manchester South-West in January 1910.[117] Colefax (the Conservative candidate) was clearly a highly capable speaker on a wide range of issues. It is essential to remember that, as is suggested throughout the present study, the strength of individual candidates needs to be seen as of critical importance during the election campaigns.

In terms of policy and approach, McLachlan regularly referred to his 'unflinching socialist principles' and focused attention principally on issues such as unemployment, poverty, trade unionism, the land question and abolition of the House of Lords.[118] On the surface, apart from the House of Lords issue, the Labour programme did not seem to differ enormously from than that of the Liberals, although McLachlan presented his policies in more overt socialistic language. The January 1910 election placed Labour in a difficult position. Given the prominence of the constitutional question it was even harder for the Labour Party to offer a particularly distinct appeal. Blewett suggests that, essentially, Labour candidates were 'little more than surrogates for Radicals' and identified how little Labour speeches in 1910 differed from most of the Liberals.[119] Analysis of Manchester's other Labour candidates tends to support this view. McLachlan in South-West Manchester was the exception. McLachlan's socialist inclinations help explain why both the local Liberal Association and McLachlan himself remained so determined to contest the seat. His predecessor George Kelley had been a prominent Lib-Laber whom most Liberals (activist and supporters) believed to be one of them. With a change of personnel, not to mention political stance, the situation changed quite dramatically. The episode clearly illustrates the complexities surrounding the political culture of Lib-Lab trade

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[116] See *Manchester Courier*, 8th January 1910.
[117] Note that although the whole constituency was given significant attention throughout the campaign it appears that the Conservatives targeted Hulme in particular, addressing countless meetings there each day, see *Manchester Courier*, 8th January 1910.
[118] *Manchester Evening News*, 5th January 1910.
[119] Blewett, *Peers, Parties and the People*, p. 109.

unionists such as Kelley. The following section evaluates the remainder of the contests in Manchester.

Labour v Conservative contests in Manchester in January 1910

In Manchester North-East, J. R. Clynes, like the other Labour candidates in January 1910 made social reform the key focus of his campaign. Declaring himself 'a worker for the workers', Clynes spoke of a need for a 'war on poverty [and] social injustice' and he argued in particular that the only way to enable truly effective social legislation was to 'abolish the House of Lords completely'.[120] The extent to which this appeal proved to be effective was questionable however. Clynes later remarked that 'the very poorest people, who least understand the causes from which they suffer, were the least responsive to our appeals [and were] deceived by the quack remedies of the Tariff Reformers'.[121] This was an astute observation by Clynes; indeed, the Conservatives remained exceptionally strong among the poorest in the slum areas of Manchester. These areas (largely concentrated around the city centre) were occupied by casual workers who remained outside the influence of trade unions.[122] Nonetheless, throughout the campaign Clynes remained focused on the issue of social reform and the 'great Liberal work' which had been done. He told one audience how there had been 'more genuine endeavour to effect social advancement by legislation during the [previous] four years than in any previous ten years on the part of any political party in this country'.[123] Overwhelmingly, Clynes campaigned on a virtually identical platform to that of the city's Liberal candidates; simply focusing on social reform and the obstructionist tactics of the House of Lords. His Unionist opponent, Manchester City Councillor and local solicitor, Sir W. Vaudrey, adopted the same approach as Colefax in Manchester South-West that was to argue that the Budget did nothing for the working man and that Tariff Reform offered the best prospect of improving the condition of the people, in particular in alleviating unemployment. [124] In his election

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[120] Generally the attitude of Labour candidates was to provide support to the government with regards to the constitutional question. There was very little difference between the lines adopted by Liberals or Labour candidates. For a useful account of Labour and the constitutional question see Douglas, R. 'Labour and the Constitutional Crisis' in K D Brown, *The First Labour Party*. Douglas highlights how Labour candidates were especially interested in land taxation and (ultimately) marked the high point of close Lib-Lab relations.

[121] *Manchester Guardian*, 17th January 1910.

[122] For details on the character of these areas see A. Kidd, *Manchester* (Keele, 1996), pp. 120-123.

[123] See *Manchester Evening News*, 7th January 1910.

[124] See *Manchester Courier*, 5th January, 7th January and 8th January 1910.

address he elaborated on how he favoured proposals for a second chamber to consist of appointed and elected peers only, strongly supported old age pensions, proper maintenance of the navy, the right of parents to 'have their children taught in their own religion' and how he was absolutely against the separation of Britain and Ireland.[125]

In Manchester East the sitting Liberal member had decided to retire at the dissolution of parliament and the prospective Liberal candidate had withdrawn just after Christmas 1909. This left a straight fight between the Labour and Unionist parties. Labour's John Sutton was a miner's agent and Manchester City Councillor. The number of electors had decreased since the previous contest. Sutton assumed this was in consequence of rising poverty in the district; many decent people he claimed had become disqualified because they had been forced to accept poor relief.[126] At the same time, the number of estimated removals in the division was high (amounting to approximately 15% of registered voters). A key question was how Liberal supporters in the division would vote? Initially, it was presumed that many of the constituency's Liberals remained hostile towards Labour but as the contest progressed the *Manchester Guardian* reported that most had 'swallowed their disappointment' and were 'rallying around Sutton in increasing numbers'.[127] Showing good grace Zimmerman also issued a personal appeal to the division's Liberals urging them to support the Labour candidate. The evidence strongly suggests that Sutton also received valuable campaign help from the Liberal Party[128] as well as from a number of other sources including students from the university, the local Baptist College and three local Co-operative Societies (Beswick, Droylsden and Manchester and Salford).[129] The co-operative movement usually adopted a non-political role; the threat of increased or new taxation on food contributed to their decision to intervene in this instance. From this point, it appears that the co-operative societies in this constituency threw their weight behind Anti-Tariff Reform candidates.[130] Throughout

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[125] *Manchester Courier*, 7th January 1910.
[126] *Manchester Guardian*, 11th January 1910.
[127] *Manchester Guardian*, 11th January 1910.
[128] A number of prominent local Liberals addressed Sutton's meetings; see speeches by Alderman M'Cabe and Councillor Norbury Williams at one of his meetings, *Manchester Evening News*, 12th January 1910. Sutton himself was keen to acknowledge the considerable assistance he received from the Liberals, see *Manchester Evening News*, 5th January 1910.
[129] *Manchester Evening News*, 12th January 1910.
[130] Ibid.

the campaign the Conservative candidate, Elvy Robb, was met by particularly hostile audiences. This was probably not helped by the fact that he was reported to have commented that if he had to live in East Manchester he would become a socialist.[131] Throughout the contest Sutton focused attention principally upon the Budget and the constitutional rights of the House of Commons (as compared to the unconstitutional exercise of the veto by the House of Lords). Sutton told electors how the Labour Party 'were not robbers but policemen protecting the interests of the working-classes' and the Unionists rejection of the budget had nothing to do with the interests of the people but 'because they would have to pay something'.[132] Sutton's opponent, Elvy Robb, adopted a pronounced pro-Empire and anti-Labour campaign and (as already mentioned) endured a difficult contest.[133] He focused his campaign almost entirely on the Tariff Reform question claiming that 'Free Trade was driving people to Socialism'[134] though he also devoted some attention to the question of the navy (the necessity to maintain it).[135]

As we can see, analysis of the January 1910 general election in Manchester highlights the pronounced differences of approach individual candidates adopted during this period across their parties as much as between them. Whilst some Conservative candidates, for instance, appeared to elaborate on issues and policy fully and effectively (Colefax, for example) the evidence suggests that others (such as Robb) adopted a more confrontational approach, bereft of detailed policy discussion, and consequently endured tremendously difficult campaigns in areas with predominantly working-class electorates.

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[131] Ibid.
[132] See *Manchester Evening News*, 4th January 1910.
[133] See *Manchester Evening News*, 11th January 1910, which provides a striking illustration of this. The newspaper reported that Robb's audience had become extremely 'impatient with him' persistently interrupting with demands of 'talk about the budget'. It seems he reacted quite aggressively (and condescendingly), telling them to 'shut their mouths' and then proceeded to declare how 'Sutton might send his roughs...but it did him more harm than good' and concluding by telling his audience of how they were going to 'have the facts rubbed into them whether they liked it or not...we are going to win this election on Tariff Reform'. Note also that the *Manchester Courier* reported how Robb's posters on hoardings were regularly being defaced or torn down; see *Manchester Courier*, 3rd January 1910.
[134] Ibid.
[135] See *Manchester Courier*, 8th January 1910.

Liberal v Unionist Contests in Manchester in January 1910

The remaining constituencies of Manchester North-West, North and South all saw straight fights between Liberal and Unionist candidates. The latter two were generally considered to be safe Liberal seats. Haworth's majority in South Manchester in 1906 had been over four thousand, one of the highest in the country. Similarly, in 1906 Manchester North had seen Charles Schwann retain the seat he had held since 1886 with a majority of nearly two and a half thousand. Manchester North-West had been lost by Churchill at the 1908 by-election, although the Liberals believed that the seat would be regained at a future general election. The Unionists made a determined effort to hold Manchester North-West and challenge Liberal dominance in Manchester North although appeared to have made a weak effort in Manchester South. Press reports suggest that the local Conservative Association had made an unwise decision with regards to their candidate in this division, especially given the context of the peers versus the people debate. The candidate, Captain Ward Jackson, was a Yorkshire squire who had no background in politics and no connection with Manchester. This point was not lost on the Liberal campaign teams throughout the contest. Given the seat's electoral history, however, it might have been difficult for the Conservatives to secure a better candidate. In contrast, Arthur Haworth was a well-known cotton merchant, noted local Congregationalist with an impressive political record.[136]

Unsurprisingly for the Liberal candidates, the central campaign issues were the Budget, constitutional reform and (inevitably) Free Trade.[137] Arthur Haworth in South-Manchester was emblematic of the Liberal approach: in asking should the working-man vote for 'handing over the power of his own vote to a non-representative, utterly irresponsible and uncontrollable House of Lords?'[138] In North-West Manchester the Liberal George Kemp was repeatedly questioned on Irish Home Rule yet attempted to avoid the subject leading the local Conservative press to conclude that he had 'failed to define his position'.[139] The Conservative candidates varied in that whilst Howell (Manchester North) and Ward-Jackson (Manchester

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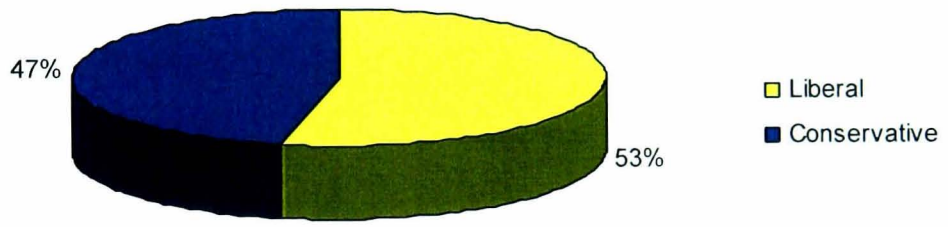
[136] *Liberal Yearbook*, 1910 and *Manchester Evening News*, 5th January 1910.
[137] Schwann, in particular, focused on Free Trade and requested that the MLF provide election hoardings dealing solely with the subject.
[138] *Manchester Guardian*, 12th January 1910.
[139] *Manchester Courier*, 14th January 1910.

South) attempted to avoid the question of the Lords,[140] in North-West Manchester Joynson-Hicks focused his campaign largely on the legitimacy of the second chamber, claiming that the House of Lords was 'the only means by which new legislation could be referred to the people of the country'.[141] In relation to the Budget, he contended that it amounted to an 'unequal taxation of wealth [and] if land was to be taxed, so should commerce and other sources of unearned increment'.[142] In a division where commercial interests dominated, such sentiments may not have represented the best strategy.

January 1910 General Election in Manchester: Results and Analysis

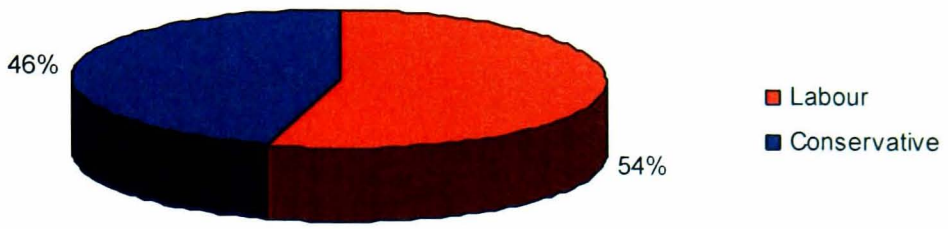
Fig. 8 Manchester North-West (Turnout 92.6%)



5.5% swing Conservative to Liberal (since 1908)

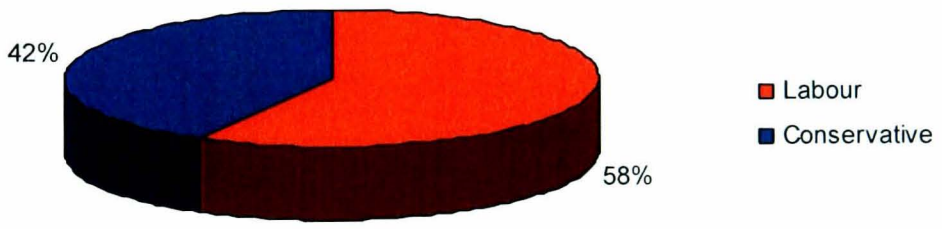
[140] Howell tried desperately to keep the question in the background, even going so far as to declare that he 'was not a peer's man' anyway. Instead he made more of the education question claiming he spoke on behalf of the National Union of Teachers although this was actually rebuffed by the union itself, see *Manchester Evening News*, 7th January 1910.
[141] See *Manchester Guardian*, 11th January 1910.
[142] Ibid.

Fig. 9 Manchester-East (Turnout 88.6%)



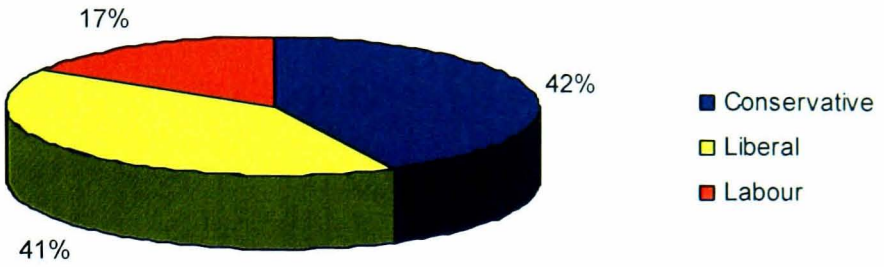
Seat uncontested by Labour in 1906

Fig. 10 Manchester North-East (Turnout 89%)



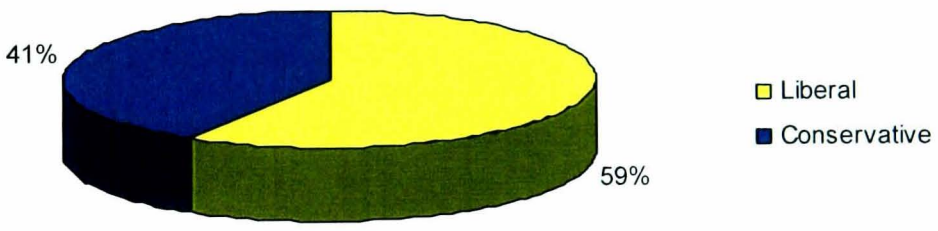
6.2% swing Labour to Conservative

Fig. 11 Manchester South-West (Turnout 89.6%)



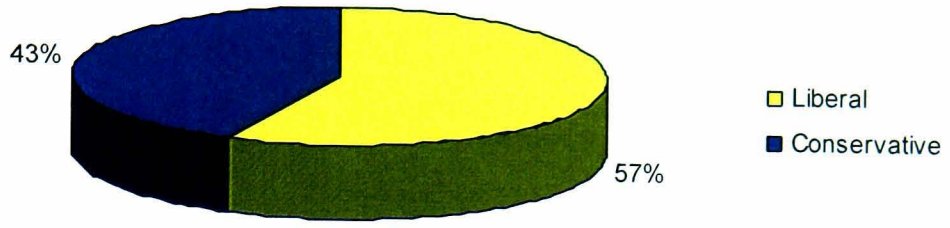
Seat uncontested by Liberals in 1906

Fig. 12 Manchester South (Turnout 88.4%)



9.1% swing Liberal to Conservative

Fig. 13 Manchester North (Turnout 89.1%)



6.8% swing Liberal to Conservative

The January 1910 general election produced a number of significant results for the Liberal Party in Manchester. By far one of the most satisfactory was the re-capturing of the Manchester North-West constituency (see fig. 8). The loss of the seat at a by-election two years earlier had represented a significant blow to the Liberals (symbolic as much as anything else). Winning the seat back in 1910 had been a key priority for the Liberals so victory here (on a 5.5% swing) served to increase the party's morale across the whole city as indeed the country.

The result of the election in East Manchester (see fig. 9) saw the Labour Party winning the seat with a majority of 1,019 (54% of the vote). The percentage decline of the 'progressive vote' since 1906 amounted to only 4.6%. Despite the events leading up to the election it does not appear that Liberal voters in the constituency had deserted Sutton and switched to the Unionists in significant numbers. In fact, the swing to the Unionists in this division was the lowest of all the Manchester constituencies suggesting that Labour was strong here. Given the constituency's electoral background (it had consistently returned Unionists after 1885), the result was one that the 'progressives' could be very happy with. Of course, had the Liberal candidate proceeded (against both Labour and Unionist) the result would have been very different. Tellingly, Sutton believed he had won because '6,110 electors were in favour of the campaign against the House of Lords, [desired to maintain] Free Trade,

[supported] the Budget and [wanted] the abolition of poverty'.[143] Clynes held Manchester North-East (see fig. 10) with a majority of 1,478 (58.4% of the popular vote) which represented a 6.2% fall in Labour's share of the vote since 1906. The result in South-West Manchester was disastrous for both progressive parties with the Unionists winning the seat with a majority of just 107 (see fig. 11). The Conservatives obtained 42.4% of the popular vote, the Liberals 41.0% and Labour 16.6%. For the Labour Party especially the result was immensely disappointing. Faced with Liberal opposition, the party had failed to successfully defend a seat which it had held, coming bottom of the poll. It seemed clear that the Liberal candidate had taken a substantial share of what in 1906 had been the LRC's vote. The experience of South-West Manchester demonstrated the difficulties Labour faced where the party lost sitting members owing to retirement or death. Retirements could encourage the Liberals to make their own claim (as will be seen in subsequent analysis of Stoke-on-Trent). Another message from the result was very clear: as the Liberal press recognised, the combined 'progressive' poll amounted to 4,222 votes (57.6% of the total), a decisive majority against the Lords. The splitting of the 'progressive' vote had negated this however, and ultimately the seat had been lost by the progressive forces because of what one senior Liberal described as 'unnecessary conditions'. There were many lessons for the future here. McLachlan attributed his defeat to the 'undeniable advantage of the Lords and the budget agitation to the Liberals' although he remained upbeat declaring that the seat had been lost temporarily to the Labour cause. Whilst McLachlan had himself placed significant emphasis on the House of Lords issue it was probably the case that voters identified the issue more specifically with the Liberal Party. Essentially, the principle lesson of the South-West result was that the seat undoubtedly contained a 'progressive' majority (as shown in the two previous elections) but this was not large enough for either the Liberals or Labour to win within the context of a three-cornered contest, i.e. the ultimate lesson was that the Progressive Alliance worked and that competition led to defeat.

In Manchester South (see fig. 12) the Liberal Party managed to hold the seat but with a significantly reduced majority of 2,452 (58.9% of the popular vote compared to 68.0% in 1906). This constituted a hostile swing of 9.1% and was in the context of a

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[143] *Labour Leader*, 21st January 1910.

weak Conservative candidate. In Manchester North (see fig. 13) the Liberal Party held the seat with a majority of 1,259 (56.9% of the vote). This represented a decrease of 6.8% in the Liberal share of the popular vote when compared to 1906 although elections before then had seen the Liberal vote fluctuate between 50.2% (it's lowest) in 1900 and 52.8% (it's highest) in 1895. Therefore the January 1910 result, in this light, suggests that, here, the Liberal Party was retaining much of its support. Schwann, an elder statesman of Manchester Liberalism remained a highly popular MP and his personal prestige was possibly a major factor in sustaining the Liberal vote.

The December 1910 General Election in Manchester

The January 1910 general election campaign had been lengthy and intense. In contrast, the December contest was shorter and less heated and some observers sensed that a degree of apathy had begun to set in. The December 1910 general election proved to be anything but a dull contest, however. As Blewett suggests, it was, in fact, only during the December campaign that the constitutional question achieved the primacy it had been denied during the earlier contest.[144] Since the December election took place on an eleven month old register the efficiency of the party organisations would be of critical importance and, in particular, the timing of the election required some considerable effort in terms of locating removals. As soon as the election had been announced, in Manchester, officials from the *MLF* responded quickly by placing adverts in the city's newspapers requesting that notification of removals be forwarded to their offices. The immediate response to these adverts alone resulted in over 500 replies providing details of changes.[145] Analysis of Manchester suggests that before 1914 there were clear differences in respect to the efficiency of the respective party organisations. At both national and constituency level the Liberal Party organisation in 1910 was at the peak of its efficiency.[146] In Manchester, Liberal organisation lacked neither workers nor funds. This was in sharp contrast to both the Labour Party and the Conservatives who clearly struggled to match the effectiveness of the Liberal organisation.[147] Yet, organisational shortcomings did not prevent the Conservatives

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[144] See N. Blewett, *Peers, Parties and the People*, p. 379.
[145] *Manchester Liberal Federation, Executive Committee Minutes* (report on the conduct of the general election) 13th December 1910.
[146] For assessment of the national organisation in 1910 see N. Blewett, *Peers, Parties and People*, pp. 276-279.
[147] Labour faced particular problems in respect of tracking down removals especially in the poorest parts of the city, for example, in East Manchester, of the 12,646 electors, it was estimated that

from mounting a full scale assault on one of Manchester's most famous seats in December 1910.

By selecting one of the country's best known advocates of Tariff Reform, Andrew Bonar Law, for Manchester North-West, the Unionists had determined to attack Free Trade in a seat so fundamentally synonymous with it.[148] Bonar Law had given up the prospect of a safe seat in South Dulwich to contest the Manchester constituency although allegedly he had been promised another safe one were he not to win in Manchester. In his opening address, Bonar Law declared that the critical question was whether 'the British nation was going to be master of his own house, or is our government and country to be subject to a cabinet whose policy is dictated by a faction' (meaning the Liberal radicals).[149] A major plank of Bonar Law's campaign was opposition to the Parliament Bill principally on the grounds that (he contended) 'so long as the Government can command a majority in the commons for two years [it] can do anything it likes, not even excepting the power to abolish the crown'.[150] A few days later he told an audience how the Commons 'could do what it liked; they could make Keir Hardie President of a British Republic'.[151] In support of his Tariff Reform proposal Bonar-Law told voters how any increase in the price of food would be alleviated by taking taxation off other goods' and it would not disrupt trade in the cotton industry since trade between Britain and the empire would be increased. Ultimately, as the *Manchester Guardian* suggested (slightly sarcastically) Bonar Law's central message was for 'free trade between Britain and India against the rest of the world'.[152] Bonar Law's opponent, George Kemp (who had regained the seat for the Liberals in the January contest) focused most attention to the question of the

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approximately half had moved since the register had been compiled, see *Manchester Guardian*, 9th December 1910. See also *Manchester and Salford Labour Representation Committee Annual Report*, 1910 which reports that 'whilst Manchester [was] the only town in the country returning two Labour members it is one of the weakest in organisation'.

[148] Blewett suggests that there were two key objectives to Bonar Law's candidature in Manchester North West, first, it was hoped that it would provide a much needed boost for the Conservatives in Lancashire and secondly, it could encourage the wider unity of the party behind Protectionism, see N. Blewett, *Peers, Parties and People*, p. 23. Contesting such a famous Free-Trade seat, or at least in terms of how the Liberals perceived it, no doubt also boosted Bonar Law's personal reputation as a leader of the Tariff Reform movement.

[149] *Manchester Guardian*, 22nd November 1910.

[150] Ibid.

[151] *Manchester Guardian*, 25th November 1919.

[152] *Manchester Guardian*, 26th November 1910.

House of Lords veto, arguing that, had it not been for the veto, even more extensive reform legislation could have been introduced.

In Manchester North-East, the seat's sitting Labour member, J. R. Clynes, contended that the contest was 'not one between the Commons and the Lords but a battle between the peers and the people'.[153] The division's Liberals placed advertisements on hoardings, circulated over six thousand election addresses in support of his candidature and also assisted in the supply of motor cars.[154] Without this assistance Clynes would undoubtedly have been disadvantaged. The Conservative candidate was a well-known local philanthropist, Arthur Taylor, and like Bonar Law, he sought to emphasise that the cotton industry would not be disadvantaged by a measure of Tariff Reform.

In the neighbouring Manchester North division the Conservative candidate, the city councillor and journalist H. E. Howell, also enthusiastically advocated fiscal reform and placed this at the forefront of his campaign, ahead of the constitutional debate.[155] He also gave some considerable attention to the Irish Home Rule Question. In other constituencies the Unionist candidates sought to evade the Tariff Reform question altogether. In South Manchester, for instance, Philip Glazebrook ignored the issue altogether and somehow managed to avoid the constitutional question although he went so far as to tell voters that 'if the will of the country is that the hereditary principle should go then it must go'. [156] The Unionist campaign in South Manchester came to an abrupt end, however, when after failing to submit his nomination papers in time, the candidate was disqualified from the contest and the sitting member was returned unopposed.[157] Not surprisingly, this enraged many local Unionists and the following weeks saw a tirade of protests in the pages of the *Manchester Courier*. For some, this was the tip of the iceberg for a local organisation in a bad way; one

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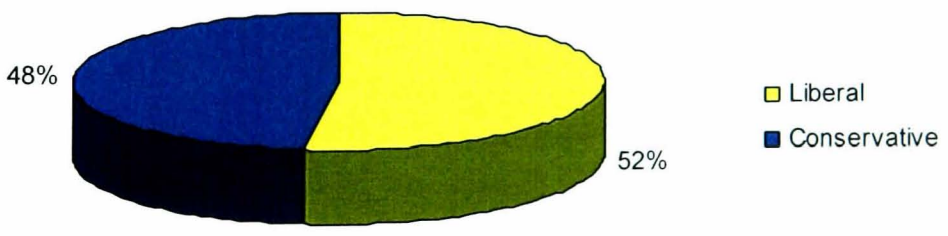
[153] Ibid.
[154] See *Manchester Liberal Federation Minutes*, 13th December 1910.
[155] Howell was a passionate anti-Irish Home Ruler; see, for example, *Manchester Guardian*, 24th November 1910.
[156] See *Manchester Guardian*, 25th November 1910.
[157] Arthur Hawarth did offer to resign the seat in order to allow Glazebrook to fight the election but this was declined. The episode was widely reported in the press and a general consensus emerged that it represented yet another indicator of the poor state of Conservative organisation in the city; see *Manchester Guardian*, 5th December, 1910, for example.

respondent went so far as to declare that 'Manchester Unionism was hopeless'.[158] The Unionist position was much better in the neighbouring constituency of Manchester South-West which the party had captured in January (albeit owing to a triangular contest resulting from a breakdown of Liberal-Labour relations). In the December contest the sitting Unionist member, H. A. Colefax, had a straight fight with a Liberal; C. T. Needham. Both candidates attempted to capture the large working-class vote by focusing on questions such as unemployment, social reform and poverty. Unusually, the question of the veto was largely ignored by both candidates. Throughout the campaign it was generally expected that those who had supported the Labour candidate in the January contest would now transfer their vote to the Liberals. The local Unionist press, however, took strong objection to this assumption arguing that such predictions were as 'unwarrantable as they were gratuitous'.[159] The Unionists were no doubt appreciative of the fact that their chances were indeed reduced on this occasion and mindful of the fact that constant press reports of a 'natural' transference of the Labour vote to the Liberal candidate could contribute to such happening. This might also help to explain the Conservative candidate's tactics in terms of the issues focused upon.

The December 1910 in Manchester General Election Results and Analysis

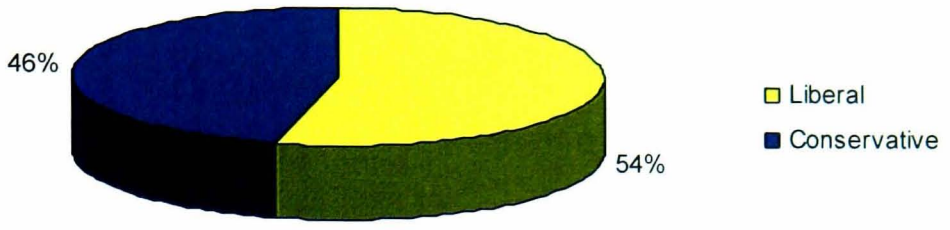
Fig. 14 Manchester North-West (Turnout 89.2%)



1.4% swing Liberal to Conservative

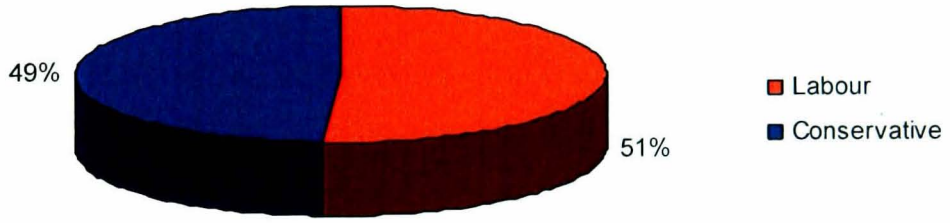
[158] See *Manchester Courier*, 5th December 1910 and preceding day's coverage.
[159] See *Manchester Courier*, 25th November 1910.

Fig. 15 Manchester North (Turnout 83%)



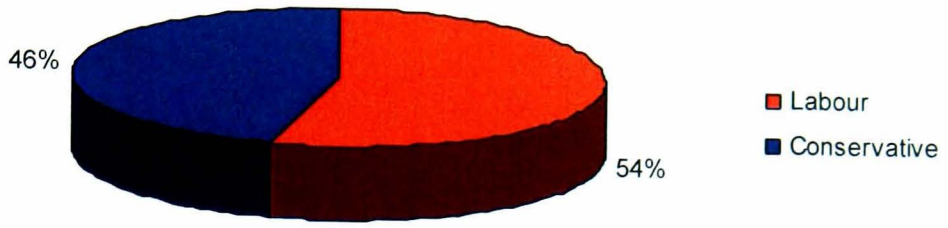
3% swing Liberal to Conservative

Fig. 16 Manchester North-East (Turnout 84.8%)



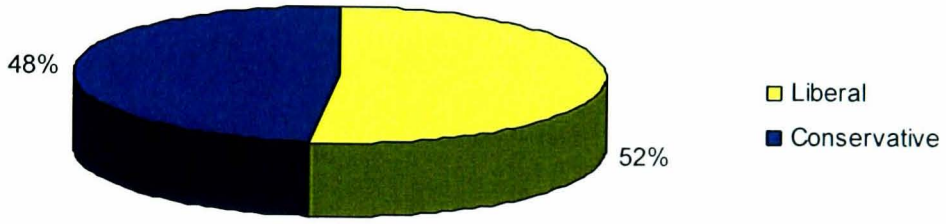
7.2% swing Labour to Conservative

Fig. 17 Manchester East (Turnout 80.5%)



0.2% swing Labour to Conservative

Fig. 18 Manchester South-West (Turnout 84.6%)



8.3% swing Conservative to Liberal

The December 1910 general election proved to be a major setback for the Conservative Party in Manchester. The election saw the return of four Liberals and two Labour members for the city. The contested seats resulted in two Liberal holds (North-West and North), one Liberal gain (South-West) and Labour holding the seats which it already possessed (North-East and East). In Manchester North-West (see fig. 8) the Liberal Party held the seat but with a smaller majority of 445. Yet, importantly, this only amounted to a hostile swing of 1.4% and this had been within the context of a very high profile Conservative candidate. This equated to 52.1% of the popular vote compared to 53.5% and a 783 majority in January of that year. The Liberals appeared to be holding their own in this critical Manchester constituency although, of course,

the party had not won with a massive majority (and the issue of the veto no doubt had added significantly to the Liberal poll); the seat was not secure by any means. In Manchester North (see fig. 15) the Liberals again held the seat but with a much smaller majority (665 compared to 1,259 in January). The share of the popular vote had declined from 56.9% to 53.9%. It should be noted that the turnout had decreased from 89.1% in January to 83.0% in December (624 voters). Removals may have contributed to this figure. The result in Manchester North appeared to suggest that the Unionists were making some headway. It should be remembered, however, that historically margins had always been narrow in this division. Before 1906, Schwann's majority had been 455 at its highest (in 1895) and 26 at its lowest (in 1900). The majority of 2,454 in 1906 had been exceptional. In reality, Manchester North was a more marginal seat than the 1906 result might imply. The sitting member's personal appeal undoubtedly helped sustain the Liberal vote and perhaps helps to explain a swing against the Liberals here of just 3%; were he to retire, however, the Liberal position might be less secure.

The most interesting contest in January 1910 had been that of Manchester South-West which had seen a triangular fight resulting in the Unionists capturing the seat from the Liberals. In December the Liberals regained Manchester South-West (see fig. 18) with a small majority of 259 (51.9% of the popular vote). In January this figure had been 41.0%. The Unionist vote had increased by 10.9% (on a reduced turnout of 84.6% from 89.6% / 412 votes). The Liberal vote had increased by 1,264 (roughly the same as the Labour vote in January). Whilst we cannot assume that this represented a straightforward transference of votes from Labour to Liberal, a large number of the Labour voters in January must have switched to the Liberal candidate in the later contest. Results such as this served to reinforce the importance of the maintenance of the Progressive Alliance.

The two Labour victories in the December 1910 general election were also won with reduced majorities. In Manchester North-East (see fig. 16) Clyne's majority fell from 1,478 (in January) to just 205 in December 1910 (58.4% to 51.2% of the popular vote). This represented a hostile swing of 7.2% since the previous election. As across the city, the turnout rate had fallen from 89.0% to 84.8% between January and December. In the East division (see fig. 17) John Sutton retained the seat he had won

earlier in the year with a majority of 871 (the highest of all the city's divisions). In the January election it had been 1,019, so in percentage terms the Labour share of the popular vote had decreased but only by a small fraction (54.5% to 54.3%) which amounted to a very small swing of just 0.2%. It should also be pointed out that the turnout had also dropped markedly here to 80.5% from 88.6 in the January election. Despite winning both the seats it contested in Manchester in December 1910, the local Labour organisation was quick to acknowledge that significant improvements were essential if the party was to maintain its parliamentary position in the city. Clynes told the *Labour Leader* afterwards that it was 'necessary for the Labour Party to make greater preparation in the future than we have done up to now...the lack of permanent organisation must be removed'.[160] The *Labour Leader* complained that 'one man cannot be expected to improvise an efficient organisation where none previously exists' and suggested that local shortcomings were largely because of the central party's 'inattention to the work of organisation' concluding that, in consequence, they had jeopardised the seat of so valuable an MP as Clynes.[161]

Evaluation of the 1910 general elections illustrates a number of aspects in relation to political development in Manchester. In terms of organisation, the Liberal Party appeared to be in good shape in all parts of the city. Historians such as Thompson have identified weaknesses in other parts of the country but the evidence in Manchester suggests that the Liberal Party had successfully overhauled its organisation by 1910. This did not mean that the party was complacent about its electoral position however; throughout the year the local organisation had made strenuous efforts to ensure that it was ready for a contest. The effectiveness of the party machine would be critical in order to ward off determined Unionist attempts to regain a foothold in the city's parliamentary representation. The Unionists were determined to recapture some of the lost ground of 1906 and this was especially the case in constituencies such as Manchester North-West which the party had re-captured at an intervening by-election but had lost at the general election in January 1910. Here, as we have seen, the choice of candidate reflected the Conservative Party's extent of ambition and Bonar-Law had himself relinquished the prospect of a

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[160] *Labour Leader*, 5th December 1910.
[161] *Labour Leader*, 9th December 1910.

safe seat to stand in Manchester. But even with such a strong candidate the swing against the Liberals proved to be very small (at 1.4%) and suggests that, whilst this was certainly not a safe Liberal seat, the Liberal Party was performing very well here.

For the Labour Party, as analysis of the election campaigns in Manchester illustrates, prospects for the future appeared somewhat insecure despite having two MPs in the city. The majorities in 1906 had been high (primarily because of the huge backlash against the Unionists) but by the end of 1910 these had been dramatically reduced. The North-East constituency in particular presented potential problems. Clynes was undoubtedly becoming a popular political figure locally but his majority had decreased alarmingly, 2,432 to 1,478 to 205 (29.2% to 2.4%) over the course of three elections. In Manchester North-East, a predominantly working-class constituency, Labour should have been strengthening its position but this was not the case; an obvious difficulty was organisation. As we have seen, the Labour Party had no permanent local organisation to match that of the established parties (especially the Liberals); its presence was limited to the work of the local councillors, activists and the candidates themselves. No matter how remarkable their efforts, they were not enough to sustain the party's electoral position in the area and considerable improvement in organisation was needed; given the limited numbers of canvassers it is probable that many potential Labour voters were simply missed. The support of the local Liberal Association was invaluable yet this did not serve to underline the Labour Party's distinct features. Significantly, Clynes stated that his party had met its weakest response from the poorest electors. These were probably the least likely to attend political meetings or take the initiative to register themselves. Labour's inability to take active measures to reach these voters may have been critical, though whether they would have voted in their favour remains uncertain. While clearly appreciative of the difficulties facing Clynes, the national party appeared slow to address these issues and had there been a general election in 1915 it is quite possible that Clynes may have lost his seat.[162] In terms of issues, both the general elections of 1910 had been dominated by the constitutional question though the extent to which this issue actually dominated the campaigns in the constituencies differed dramatically.

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[162] See correspondence between J. R. Clynes, W. T. Jackson (chairman of the Manchester and Salford LRC) and E. J. Howarth (Miles Platting ILP) and Francis Johnson (at the NAC) in relation to this. It is evident that the local organisation remained anxious that improvements be made in the constituency organisation; see *Francis Johnson Collection, ILP 4, 09/1-20.*

2.4: The 1912 By-Elections in Manchester

Manchester South (March 1912)

During 1912 there were two by-elections in Manchester and it is arguable that in both instances the issue of National Insurance proved decisive in determining the results. On its introduction the 1911 Insurance Act generated considerable controversy. Many of the skilled working-classes already paid into schemes run by either friendly societies or their trade unions. Consequently, many assumed (albeit wrongly) that with the arrival of a national scheme they would have to pay twice or at least receive lesser benefits under the state scheme. Conservative campaigning encouraged these misconceptions whilst the general principle of the scheme (providing for others as well as insuring oneself) remained anathema within a prevailing Victorian value system whereby a clear distinction was made between the deserving and undeserving poor.[163]

The first of the two by-elections in Manchester during 1912 followed the appointment of Sir Arthur Haworth to the position of Junior Lord of the Treasury. Convention usually ensured that such elections were uncontested though the Unionists were eager to capture this critical seat as they had in 1908. Haworth's opponent was Philip Glazebrook, a candidate in December 1910 but who had been disqualified when his nomination papers had been returned too late. When this election was announced Glazebrook was unfortunately out of the country on a cruise and had to correspond with his party and electors via cablegram, returning for only the last few days of the campaign. Haworth chose to focus almost exclusively on the Insurance Act and the Irish Home Rule Bill. In relation to the insurance question he attempted to reassure voters that even if they were already in a scheme they would receive substantially increased benefits including not only sickness cover but, amongst other things, maternity cover and care for consumptives at no additional cost. Haworth specifically addressed employers asking if it were not better to have healthier workers than unhealthy ones and he stated that the scheme would see a significant reduction in the

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[163] See B. B. Gilbert, *The Evolution of National Insurance in Great Britain: The Origins of the Welfare State in Great Britain* (London, 1984); D. Fraser, *The Evolution of the Welfare State* (London, 1996); J. Harris, *Unemployment and Politics: A Study in English Social Policy 1886-1914* (Oxford, 1972) and J. R. Hay, *The Origins of the Liberal Welfare Reforms, 1906-1914* (London, 1975).

numbers of people forced into seeking poor relief and so would therefore reduce expenditure in this respect.[164]

A major difficulty for the Liberals in South Manchester was that a sizable proportion of electors were already in schemes and enjoyed relative security of employment. Furthermore, it was customary for the warehouses based in the division to provide sick pay (albeit for a limited period). It was widely perceived, therefore, that an employee would be compelled to pay four pence per week for something he was sure of already and instead of receiving full wages during illness he would have to 'depend on a beggarly pittance from the state'. [165] Thus, trying to convince the warehousemen and clerks in the constituency of the wider benefits of the Insurance Act proved problematic for the Liberal Party. The insurance scheme was to revolutionise welfare provision in the United Kingdom. In comparison to existing provisions and entitlements provided by unions and friendly societies the Act marked a dramatic improvement. The Liberal campaign promoted the idea of the scheme as a 'state aided, employer aided thrift club'[166], which to all intents and purposes it was. The aspect of compulsion, however, perhaps did more than anything to undermine the scheme's appeal. Moreover, Unionist portrayal of the measure as a 'serious menace to the prosperity of the country' which would have an 'especially adverse affect', in a district such as South Manchester further heightened voters concerns. [167]

As Glazebrook remained abroad, the Unionists relied upon a series of guest speakers. All focused on the alleged defects of the Insurance Act and other aspects of the Liberal Government's social programme. One spoke of the 'expensive amusement of old age pensions'.[168] The Liberal party, on the other hand, argued that since the Unionists had voted for the measure in the House of Commons it was 'dishonest now to make [it] a plank at by-elections' and that the election had deteriorated into a campaign of 'negation and falsehoods'.[169] Liberal speakers sought to appeal to the goodwill of the public spirit declaring the Act represented 'the greatest step in the cause of national health and in the individual happiness of humble homes there had

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[164] See *Manchester Evening News*, 24th February 1912.
[165] *Manchester Guardian*, 27th February 1912.
[166] *Manchester Guardian*, 26th February 1912.
[167] Glazebrook via cablegram, see *Manchester Guardian*, 24th February 1912.
[168] *Manchester Courier*, 3rd March 1912.
[169] See Sir John Simon speech, *Manchester Guardian*, 4th March 1912.

ever been produced'. It was the first attempt to 'guard English people against the worst horrors of being poor'.[170] The Liberal Party clearly went into polling day anxious although they believed they were 'holding their own' in Longsight and Moss Side although less so in Rusholme (generally recognised as a Tory stronghold) but the party assumed that the electorate now had 'an increased awareness of the details of the Act'[171] and had come to recognise its 'soundness' so the electoral response would be to 'show their confidence in [this] government policy'.[172]

Manchester South By-Election Result and Analysis

Fig. 19 Manchester South (Turnout 84%)

11% swing Liberal to Conservative

The result of the Manchester South by-election seems to have come as a surprise to both parties; the Conservatives captured the seat with a majority of 579 (4%) on turnout of 84% (see fig. 19). Although the swing against the Liberals was large (given that Haworth's majority had previously been over 2,000) perhaps we ought to be cautious in interpreting such a loss as necessarily indicative of a wider crisis for the Liberal Party. The Conservative majority at the by-election was not a very large one and it is worth remembering that the constituency had an erratic electoral history before 1906. More specifically, however, as we have seen the result had largely been determined by clerks and warehousemen who perceived their interests to be threatened by current Liberal legislation (primarily the Insurance Act). In an

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[170] Ibid.
[171] *Manchester Evening News*, 5th March 1912.
[172] See Asquith's message to the constituency, *Manchester Guardian*, 5th March 1912.

immediate sense this represented a problem for the Liberal Party but it did not mean it would continue to be a long-term or insurmountable one.

The Manchester North West By-Election (July 1912)

The resignation of the Liberal MP Sir George Kemp in July 1912 saw the voters of North-West Manchester participating in their fifth parliamentary election in the space of just six years. Few constituencies witnessed such regular change in their parliamentary representation as did this one. Of all by-elections in the North-West of England before 1914 this was one of the most hotly contested. For the Liberals the loss of North-West Manchester at this time (so close to Haworth's defeat in Manchester South) would represent a considerable blow, whilst for the Unionists its recapture could be seen to be emblematic of a wider turnaround in fortunes for their party and the beginning of the end of the present government. Given the evident unpopularity of much recent legislation, in particular the Insurance Act, the prospect of an election in this constituency in the summer of 1912 was, for the Liberals undesirable to say the least. The party did everything it could to avoid an election and this led to, as Clarke observes, to 'one of the most extraordinary and sustained campaigns to keep a man in parliament against his will'.[173] The precise reasons for Kemp's decision to resign caused considerable speculation in both the national and local press. The Unionist press believed it to be exclusively connected to his objection to the Home Rule Bill and he had certainly been at odds with his party over the question, having been one of only two Liberals elected at the last general election who had declared himself against home rule and he had spoken against it in the House of Commons. On the Bill's second reading he had abstained from voting altogether. Both party officials and Kemp himself repeatedly stated that his resignation was for personal (business) reasons and he even offered his services on the election platform[174] but the precise reason was almost certainly due to his objection to recent policy and it is likely that he wanted to be out by the third reading of the Home Rule Bill.

By 1912 Kemp was clearly at odds with his party, not just in respect of Home Rule, however, but also in connection to Welsh Disestablishment. By the spring of 1912 his

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[173] P. Clarke, *Lancashire,* p. 304.
[174] Letter to the *Manchester Guardian* , 16th July 1912

resignation appeared increasingly inevitable. Correspondence with the Manchester Liberal Federation suggests Kemp had first intimated his intentions to resign as early as March 1912.[175] The party, however, clearly desired that he stay longer, preferably up to a future general election but in the meantime persuaded him to put it off until at least June of that year. Kemp assured constituents that he would 'put in the occasional appearance in the House' and when he was unable to be there he would use the pairing system.[176] The manner in which the Kemp situation was handled appears to have damaged Liberal prospects. By delaying the inevitable it almost certainly allowed the Unionists to begin preparations for a contest. The Conservatives had secured a candidate and a good amount of campaigning in the constituency had already been undertaken[177] but it was clear that there existed uncertainty in respect of a prospective Liberal candidate. Rumours circulated that the local association had preferred Sir Arthur Haworth over the (assumed) nominee Gordon Hewart. As Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Royal Exchange and as a popular local Liberal, Haworth would have generally been considered a preferred candidate for many[178] although it is possible that given the character of the electorate (in large measure anti-Irish, pro-empire and Anglican) it might have been politically necessary for the Liberals to adopt a unionist Free Trader.

It seemed possible that Labour intervention might further damage Liberal prospects in North-West Manchester. A meeting of the North West branch of the ILP had been called on the 17th July to discuss the selection of a candidate and a full meeting of the full membership of the Manchester Labour Party had also been called. A possible candidate appears to have been J. M. McLachlan who had previously contested South West Manchester in January 1910. Furthermore, the Manchester and Salford ILP had issued a recommendation that the seat should be contested.[179] A week later the *Manchester Courier* was appalled at how the 'Labour Party had been left behind' suggesting that the Liberals had deliberately sped up the process in order to prevent

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[175] See *Manchester Liberal Federation Minutes*, 15th March 1912.
[176] *Manchester Courier*, 17th July 1912.
[177] The Unionist candidate, Sir John Randles, was a very well known local businessman.
[178] Given that Hawarth had only recently lost his seat in Manchester South in April of that year it is unlikely that he would have wished to stand again so soon, especially in a seat considered vulnerable. It is also believed that an approach had been made to the Unionist Free Trader Thomas Gibson Bowles to stand as an Independent candidate but he declined the offer, cited in P. Clarke, *Lancashire*, p. 304.
[179] *Manchester Courier*, 18th July 1912.

Labour from selecting a candidate thus 'showing their late allies little consideration'.[180] Nothing came of a Labour candidate, but the episode demonstrates a willingness of the Labour Party locally to consider the possibility of contesting a seat which the Liberals would have certainly perceived to have been naturally theirs. The Liberal Party adopted as their candidate a young local barrister, Gordon Hewart, who had been educated at Manchester Grammar School, Oxford University and had for a while pursued a career in journalism. The Conservative candidate was the more experienced John Randles who had previously been the MP for Cockermouth and had extensive business interests in Manchester.

The Manchester North-West contest took place shortly after a by-election in Crewe which had seen the Unionists win with a sizable majority. The Liberal Party had seen a substantial decrease of its vote (2355) and it was understood this ensured the Unionists entered the Manchester contest with a renewed sense of confidence and optimism. It also gave the Unionists a recent victory to cite on the election platforms in Manchester. Furthermore, the close proximity of the Crewe contest (in time and location) also meant that a substantial number of party workers were able to be redeployed to the Manchester campaign.

From the beginning of the contest it was clear that, although not totally dominant, the question of the Insurance Act would again be the most prominent issue of the campaign. In his opening address the Conservative candidate, Sir John Randles, argued that in a by-election, with no prospect of a change of government, it was pointless to even discuss the question of Tariff Reform.[181] Instead he sought to discuss the 'sufferings resulting from current legislation'. In a noticeably 'one nation' tone he spoke of social, political and economic justice and national unity. The commercial credentials of Randles were also emphasised with headlines such as 'a business man for business people' in contrast to the lack of a business record of the Liberal candidate. [182] Moreover, it could be suggested that, in this case, it was the Manchester employers' opposition to the Insurance Act which did most to damage the Liberal

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[180] *Manchester Courier*, 26th July 1912.
[181] *Manchester Courier* 27th July 1912. Randles even went so far as to suggest he was doing the Liberals 'a great service by not making Tariff Reform the most prominent issue of the election [because if he did] ...it would be clear that Manchester had repudiated the Free-Trade system'. *Manchester Guardian*, 31st July 1912.
[182] *Manchester Courier*, 29th July 1912.

Party's prospects. As had been the case during a by-election the previous summer in Oldham and in Manchester South earlier in 1912, the basic position of the business sector was that the Act would severely handicap the British employer in the world market. Furthermore, it could lead to a rise in unemployment. Ultimately, National Insurance was neither liked nor understood and despite the Liberals considerable efforts to increase understanding of the measure it seems that electors of all classes remained unconvinced of its merits. For the Liberals the Insurance Act represented one aspect of the Government's drive to promote the 'social advancement of the people' and to 'awaken in the minds of [the people] a desire for something better by securing equality and financial justice'.[183] Whilst for the Unionists it took away from trade unions, friendly societies and other working class organisations the management of their own funds. Additionally, they argued, the worker would receive fewer benefits while having to contribute more. They argued that it had been pushed through too quickly, drawing attention to the fact that in Germany it had taken seven years to develop such a scheme.[184] Crucially for employers and Unionists alike, the cost of implementation was huge and the charge on employers considerable. Unionist objections amounted to carefully considered criticism rather than blanket hostility, so Randles was able to happily declare he thought the Act 'a good thing [it was just that it] had been carried out in the worst possible way; creating maximum irritation with the minimum of benefits'.[185] As the by-election demonstrated, the Liberals possibly confused some voters with an array of complex information relating to the Insurance Act and neither did the Liberal candidate help matters; at one meeting, for example, he told voters that he realised the scheme 'pressed hard on individuals [but ultimately] was capable of amendment'.[186] In response the local Unionist press concluded that he should 'join the Amend the Act League'.[187]

Home Rule was the other main issue which divided the parties during the by-election. The position of the Unionists was clear; any measure of Home Rule would lead to the disintegration of the nation, weaken the Empire and (in the process) would have a

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[183] This is taken from an election address by the Liberal candidate during the previous year's by-election campaign in Oldham, *Manchester Guardian,* 3rd November 1911.
[184] *Manchester Courier*, 7th August 1912.
[185] *Manchester Courier*, 2nd August 1912.
[186] See *Manchester Courier*, 30th July 1912.
[187] Ibid; it is unclear whether there existed such an organisation or whether this was simply the *Manchester Courier's* witty journalism.

detrimental impact upon trade (including trade between Manchester and Ireland). Given the importance of empire to the interests of the North-West constituency it was interesting that the Liberal candidate stated he was looking 'not only for Home Rule for Ireland but for each component part of the empire'.[188] Hewart also sought to emphasise not only the moral rationale for Home Rule but rather wider practical considerations; he argued that delegating to Ireland management of its own affairs would relieve Parliament and also facilitate 'friendlier relations' with the United States. A significant misjudgement by the Liberal candidate, however, was his admission that Home Rule could 'only be carried at the price of civil war'.[189] Hewart claimed that he had been misquoted although the Liberals could have done without a controversy on this issue, especially given the retiring member's record on the subject.

On the eve of the poll the *Manchester Courier* confidently declared that the businessmen of Manchester, both Free Traders *and* Tariff reformers, would 'vote together and register their protest against the policies of the present government [deemed] injurious to their interests'.[190] Indeed, the scale of hostility towards the Insurance Act within Manchester's business community appeared to be considerable as demonstrated on the day before polling when Charles Macara issued a critical statement declaring that whilst he would not go so far as to break the law he would be engaging in a most active propaganda campaign against it. [191]

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[188] *Manchester Guardian* 29th July 1912.
[189] *Manchester Courier*, 27th July 1912.
[190] *Manchester Courier*, 7th August 1912.
[191] This appears to have been largely in consequence of the refusal of Asquith to receive a deputation of representatives of Manchester business to discuss the impact of the insurance scheme on them.

Manchester North-West By-Election Result and Analysis

Fig. 21 (Turnout 81.9%)

8.1% swing Liberal to Conservative

The 1912 Manchester North-West by-election saw the Unionists capturing the seat with sizable a majority of 1,202 (on a relatively low turnout of nearly 82%).[192] For the Unionists the result represented a substantial improvement on Bonar Law's poll in 1910 (an increase of nine percent for them and decrease of twenty one percent for the Liberals). With the North-West Manchester victory the Unionists won their eighth seat at a by-election since December 1910 reducing the Liberal majority in the House of Commons to just fourteen.[193] This represented a fragile position for the Liberal Government, although of course the votes of Labour and the Irish representatives could be assured. The Manchester Liberal press determined that 'there can be no excuse in disguising the fact that the Insurance Act in its present condition is causing endless irritation and unpopularity'.[194] The same newspaper went on to affirm that this was only likely to be 'temporary trouble', arguing that this was a Unionist victory won in Manchester itself, not the residential parts of the constituency. [195] The city men had voted against the Act because they had asserted it would mean an extra charge on their business. Furthermore, since Randles had refused to accept Tariff Reform as a fundamental issue 'the result shouldn't be taken to imply that the Free Traders in the community had lost their faith'. If anything, the result served to

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[192] This was 10% lower than that of the January 1910 general election.

[193] The 'progressive 'and nationalist majority over Unionists stood at 109 (389 to 280). After December 1910, it had been 126.

[194] *Manchester Evening News*, 9th August 1912.

[195] This was based on a comment by a Unionist official intimating that the party had polled fewer than fifty votes in Cheetham; see *Manchester Courier*, 9th August 1912.

underline for the Unionists usefulness of remaining cautious in their promotion of Tariff Reform. Clarke recognises this and suggests that, ultimately, instances such as these 'stiffened the antipathy' of many Unionists in the region towards a full-blown policy of Tariff Reform.[196] This could potentially have significant consequences for the Liberals in places such as Manchester (and Labour) since to a very large extent their victories from 1906 were largely dependent upon hostility towards Unionist candidates on the issue of Tariff Reform. For *The Times* the result demonstrated that Manchester's businessmen were 'weary and distrustful' of the Liberal Government and alarmed by 'mad Lloyd George's finance' and his 'direct incitements to class hatred upon the industrial world'.[197]

The prospect of the Liberals holding North-West Manchester during the summer of 1912 seemed bleak from the outset. The Liberals had done everything they could to persuade the constituency's sitting member to stay although this had been to no avail. Perhaps the Liberals expected to lose the seat; after all, it had always had a turbulent electoral history. Nonetheless, Manchester North-West had great symbolic value; its loss represented an embarrassment for the Liberal Party both locally and nationally. It was possible that once the benefits of the insurance scheme began to be recognised, levels of hostility and suspicion would subside. In turn, this would be reflected in terms of the Liberal Party's electoral performance. The Insurance Act was not fully operational in 1912. Whilst contributions were being made into the scheme no payments were made out. Whilst the Liberal Party lost a number of by-elections in the region during the period immediately before 1914 it would be unwise, however, to suggest that the party was facing a much wider and long-term crisis. Losses during 1911 and 1912 can be almost exclusively explained by reference to the Insurance Act. None of these by-elections were influenced by the Tariff Reform debate and even in Manchester North-West this question played virtually no part during by-election campaigns. It was likely that at future elections Tariff Reform would remain, at best, low key with detrimental implications for the Liberals; at the very least they would have to re-assess their approach in such areas. Clarke contends that 'each election

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[196] See P. Clarke, *Lancashire*, p. 305.
[197] *The Times*, 9th August 1912.

campaign had unique aspects and the balance of issues and advantage was in constant flux'.[198]

Analysis of the 1912 by-elections in Manchester demonstrates, the flagship Liberal policy of social insurance was crucial to the outcomes of both although for reasons specific to the particular constituencies. In South Manchester it was suburban working-class hostility to the measure which determined Liberal fortunes; in Manchester North-West it was, for the greater part, the city's commercial and businessmen who deemed their interests to be under threat from the impact of the scheme. At its inception the Unionists were able to exploit the widespread unpopularity of National Insurance to their electoral advantage. Analysis of by-elections provides limited support for the assertion that the Liberal Party was in a state of severe disintegration before the outbreak of war in 1914. The local evidence in Manchester suggests that poor electoral performance during 1912 was associated with public dissatisfaction over specific pieces of legislation.[199] Consequently, the Liberals re-doubled their efforts in Manchester North-West securing the candidature of Sir John Simon for the division at the next contest.[200]

Examination of the two campaigns in Manchester during 1912 demonstrates how poor by-election performance could clearly be determined by adverse public reaction to specific policy and legislation. The flagship Liberal policy of National Insurance was critical to the outcomes of both contests. The Conservatives obtained a significant electoral advantage from the unpopularity of the measure and aided this by conducting an aggressive propaganda campaign against it. National Insurance, of course, was a national issue and the Liberal Party was likely to face pronounced opposition for some time. The mobilisation of such hostility at the local level and (in particular) the Conservative candidates' application of their objections to local circumstances (be that specific occupational groups or interests such as business)

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[198] Ibid, p. 365.

[199] Clarke neglects the impact of controversial issues such as National Insurance at this time, barely acknowledging it at all in his assessment of this by-election.

[200] A new selection committee under Sir Arthur Hawarth was formed the following year suggesting that the Manchester Liberals remained responsive to organisational demands and the need to acquire good candidates. Hawarth himself was especially important in this respect; see *Manchester Liberal Federation Executive Committee Minutes,* 1st April 1913. Additionally, the party records show that plans for a forthcoming general election were in hand as early as January 1914, see *Manchester Liberal Federation Minutes*, 28th January, 18th February and 11th March 1914.

needs to be seen as significant when assessing the fortunes of the parties during this period.

2.5: Municipal politics in Manchester 1906-1914

Context

The Liberals had lost their overall majority on the Manchester City Council in 1887, regaining it very briefly during the mid 1890s. Opposition to the Boer War served to alienate large sections of the working-classes and consequently the Liberal Party lost a large number of its seats on the council. By 1905, Manchester City Council's elected representation was dominated by the Conservatives though the Liberals possessed a high number of Aldermen. The local Liberal organisation was mindful of the need to improve its municipal position and so set about addressing this. In 1907 the local Liberal caucus consisting of all Liberal councillors considered ways to increase the party's representation on the city council and two members were assigned to each ward particularly in an effort to secure candidates.[201] The attempt to co-ordinate more effectively the municipal progressive forces culminated in the formation of a cross- party organisation, the Municipal Progressive Association, (hereafter MPA) in 1911.[202] The role of the MPA will be discussed fully below but it is worth mentioning that even before its inception the central Liberal organisation in Manchester had already begun to look into ways of providing assistance to wards in order to promote greater interest in municipal politics and to strengthen the position of the Liberal councillors.[203] Of course, another significant aspect of the central organisation related to the Liberals relations with Labour and this might be regarded as the single most important aspect of the organisation's remit; electoral co-operation. It is important to recognise that prior to the formal creation of the MPA there appears to have been at least some tacit 'alliance' between the progressive forces in Manchester's municipal politics. How this impacted upon the electoral fortunes of the respective parties will be explored below.

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[201] See *Liberal Caucus Minutes,* 24th September 1906.

[202] See below, p. 109.

[203] The MPA became frustrated, however, in relation to a perceived lack of interest amongst retiring 'progressive' members in supporting these meetings, see *MPA Executive Committee Minutes,* 29th February 1912.

Municipal Elections in Manchester 1906-1913: Labour Performance and the Progressive Alliance at the Municipal Level

The progressive landslide across Manchester at the general election of 1906 might have appeared to offer the prospect of an equally significant advance in municipal politics yet the immediate contests after the general election saw the municipal electors voting in favour of retrenchment and against a programme of municipalisation which was advocated by both the Labour and Liberal candidates. The Conservatives fought principally on an anti-municipal trading platform and candidates who made this aspect the key plank of their campaigns overturned (sitting) Liberal majorities or, if they already held the ward, substantially increased their own. The net result of the 1906 contests was a Conservative gain of three seats.[204] Despite Labour's endeavour to increase its municipal representation, the party saw its numbers in fact decline. From the seven wards Labour contested in 1906 the party was successful in just one, Ardwick (see appendix fig. 1). The local organisation was especially disappointed with the loss of Harpurhey where W.T. Jackson was considered to be one of the party's most capable advocates (see appendix fig. 3).[205] Some of the Labour losses were exceptionally close however; in Newton Heath and St Lukes, for example, the margins were 1% (of the total vote) and 5% respectively (see appendix figs. 9 and 12) The Labour vote was generally respectable demonstrating the party's ability to pose a significant challenge yet overall the 1906 municipal contests were disappointing for both the Liberal and Labour parties. For the Liberals, the party had been defeated in wards such as Cheetham and New Cross (see appendix figs. 2 and 8) whilst the Labour Party had failed to capture working-class wards such as Longsight, St. Lukes, Harpurhey and Miles Platting (see appendix fig. 4, 6 and 12).[206] Of course, the poor performance in the municipal elections of 1906 were most likely to have been in consequence of the fact that the 'progressives' were in government and also we need to remember the overall context. Given the unpopularity of the

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[204] The LRC lost one seat (Harpurhey) and sitting Liberals were defeated in Cheetham and New Cross wards. It was believed that the Liberal Alexander Porter was defeated in Cheetham on the question of the new Education Bill; see *Manchester City News*, 3rd November 1906.

[205] Jackson lost by an extremely narrow margin of 23 votes (1% of those cast). Harpurhey possessed a large Catholic community who had previously been loyal to the Liberals on the basis of the Home Rule issue. The Education Bill, however, ignited Catholic opinion and probably underpinned the Conservatives candidate's poll (at the same time going against Labour), *Manchester Guardian*, 2nd November 1906.

[206] It was believed that the Liberal in Cheetham (Alexander Porter) had been principally defeated on the new Education Bill suggesting that region here played an important role. *Manchester City News*, 3rd November 1906.

Unionist government (and thus the party) by 1905 the Conservatives were performing badly in the municipal elections. By November 1906, however, the new Liberal government had already managed to upset many and, of course, they (and Labour for that matter) could not rely upon the issue of Free Trade to win at the municipal elections. Especially significant was the Education Bill which undoubtedly served to alienate some voters in parts of Manchester where Tory Anglican sentiment was strong. In 1906 there was just one three-cornered contest; in St George's, where the Conservatives won with a narrow majority of just 3% of the vote. Labour came third obtaining 17% of the vote. Clearly, without Labour intervention here, the Liberals would have captured the seat.

The 1907 elections in Manchester demonstrated the difficulties the Labour Party faced in presenting itself as a distinctive political force in municipal politics. Two issues dominated the 1907 contests. These were controversy over Alderman Holt's assumption of the position of Lord Mayor and unemployment.[207] On both issues the Labour candidates found it difficult to come up with any alternative proposals than their Liberal opponents. The 1907 contests saw no significant changes although W. T. Jackson, who had lost his seat the previous year in Harpurhey, was returned (in the same ward) after conducting a vigorous campaign on municipalisation (particularly for the mining industry).

There were three three-cornered contests in 1907 involving Liberal and Labour candidates. These were in Harpurhey, Longsight and New Cross. In Harpurhey Labour managed to win with a majority of 8% over the second-placed Conservative (see appendix fig. 18).[208] In Longsight and New Cross Labour came bottom although the party's vote was fairly respectable; 23% and 21% respectively (see appendix figs. 19 and 21). One aspect which had become clear during the 1907 contests was an apparent weakness of the Labour organisation in some wards. In its annual review, the city's LRC was highly critical of a 'lack of enthusiasm' on the part of the majority of its affiliated societies during the municipal contests.[209]

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[207] Given that Holt was a prominent Manchester brewer the Liberals believed his appointment as Lord Mayor was not necessarily appropriate.
[208] In percentage terms the breakdown was as follows: Labour 44%, Conservative 36%, Liberal 18% and Independent 0.8%.
[209] *Manchester and Salford Labour Representation Committee Annual Report,* 1908.

The following year (1908) saw a large number of contested seats in Manchester (25 in total). Like the previous year a principal issue of the campaigns was the question of unemployment. The role of the municipality in attempts to alleviate the problem had been given considerable exposure throughout the year because the (Liberal) Lord Mayor, John Harrop, had given the matter significant attention, had arranged a series of public meetings and also established a registry for employers. The Liberal candidates focused virtually exclusively on the issue of unemployment which arguably made it difficult for the Labour Party's candidates to present the issue in a distinctive manner. This may explain the party's seeming lack of progress; from seven candidates fielded, Labour returned two (Joseph Billam in the mining dominated district of Bradford and T. R. Marr in New Cross). Even these successes, however, were negated by the loss of Miles Platting and Openshaw, both of which saw large winning margins between Labour and the winning Conservative opponents (see appendix fig. 41 and 46). The overall result of the 1908 contests was a net Conservative gain of 6 seats. The Labour Party now had 8 elected councillors (3 fewer than it had had in 1906) and the Liberals had 10 fewer than in 1906. Clearly, the period was one of some frustration for Manchester's 'progressive' forces at the municipal level. There were no three-cornered contests in 1908 involving official Labour candidates.

The 1908 municipal elections illustrate a number of aspects in relation to party strategy and performance. The Labour Party was clearly focusing its efforts in its strongest areas (Openshaw, Harpurhey and Miles Platting for example) and, in the main, was unsuccessful (see appendix figs. 46, 38 and 41). More worryingly Labour was struggling to consolidate its position in some parts of the city we might expect it to have been performing better (see appendix fig. 31 and 45). This was evidenced by the fact that in 1908 the party saw a number of retiring members (for key wards) defeated at the municipal contests (see appendix figs. 41, 44 and 46).[210] Meanwhile, the Liberals appeared to concentrate on the central and suburban wards. The

[210] These were J. E. Gilchrist, T. H. Marr and E. J. Hart in Miles Platting, New Cross and Openshaw respectively.

Conservatives, however, were clearly able to stand in virtually every ward and the party remained dominant in Manchester's municipal politics.[211]

Due to the inclusion of Gorton and Levenshulme, the 1909 municipal elections (like the previous year) saw a large number of contested seats. Yet, the *Manchester City News* lamented how there was no 'burning question other than the vague declaration that the rates must be reduced'.[212] The elections saw contests in 24 wards for 33 vacant seats. Unsurprisingly, the parties stood a record number of candidates; 64 in total. In a sense the 1909 contests provided the Labour Party with an opportunity to make some inroads in its municipal representation on the Manchester City Council. The party stood in 12 wards (with 17 candidates).[213] The new additions to the city, however, provided somewhat mixed results for Labour. The two wards of Gorton returned 3 Labour members, 1 Liberal, 1 Conservative and an Independent whilst Levenshulme returned 3 Liberals, 2 Conservatives and an Independent.[214] In Levenshulme North, Labour came bottom, polling just 14% of the vote (see appendix fig. 66).[215] It is clear that in 1909 Labour had focused most of its efforts in three key wards, Ardwick, Harpurhey and St Lukes. But the party lost the first two very narrowly (see appendix figs. 57 and 65) although won the latter by a significant majority (see appendix fig. 78). While Labour was doing well in Gorton North the party had performed poorly in Levenshulme (see appendix figs. 63 and 66). This was largely connected to the social and religious composition of these districts. The Labour Party was doing best in the respectable working class districts; wards where the electorate primarily consisted of better paid workers[216] (and more importantly) highly unionised sectors such as the miners, engineers and railway workers.[217] These

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[211] Of the 25 contested seats in 1908 only 3 (All Saints, Bradford and Openshaw did not see a Conservative candidate. The Liberals contested 17.

[212] *Manchester City News*, 29th October 1909.

[213] This includes wards with more than one member to be elected. This compared with 21 wards and 26 candidates for the Conservatives and 12 wards (14 candidates) for the Liberals.

[214] Labour performed much better in Gorton North.

[215] Labour did not field a candidate in Levenshulme South.

[216] A reflection of this, as Adams has noted, is how the Labour wards tended to be ones with higher rents; see T. Adams, 'Labour Vanguard, Tory Bastion, or the Triumph of New Liberalism: Manchester Politics 1900-1914 in Comparative Perspective', *Manchester Region History* Review, 14 (2000), p31.

[217] Adams concludes that the 'scale and effectiveness' of local trade union organisation was one of the most singularly important factors in determining Labour expansion at the municipal level and so, as he states; the unions' most important contribution to the early Labour Party lay, less in the provision of finance and candidates for the parliamentary party, and more in building a local politics in which the concerns of certain types of working-class communities could be represented by Labour', see T. Adams, 'Labour Vanguard', p. 35.

groups were concentrated in places such as Bradford (mining), Gorton, Openshaw (engineering) and Newton Heath (railway workers). In contrast, districts such as Ardwick, Harpurhey and St Mark's contained sizable pockets of slum areas; with Irish communities though predominantly Anglican, these wards were hotbeds of popular Conservatism and thus unfruitful territory for a significant Labour advance.[218] There were just two contests which saw the Liberals and Labour in conflict.[219] These were a three-way contest in Longsight and a two-way contest in Openshaw. The former saw Labour push the Liberals into third place and the latter saw the retiring Labour member returned with a majority of 9% (see appendix figs. 68 and 73). Clearly the Liberals were standing down in favour of Labour in many of the working-class areas of the city and likewise Labour was not challenging the Liberals in the central and suburban districts area (for example, Didsbury, All Saints, Cheetham, Rusholme and St Johns).

From 1910, a number of emerging issues effectively divided local politics in Manchester along more clearly-defined party lines and were also influential at the municipal elections. One of the most controversial was the future of the Royal Infirmary site and candidates at municipal elections sought to attach political meaning to utilisation of the site.[220] Labour candidates attempted (although largely failed) to divert attention from this issue and onto the question of housing, particularly the purchasing powers of the corporation and the acquisition of land for building programmes.[221] In 1910 Labour continued to focus on the areas of the city where it already had a strong presence; the party's 10 candidates were concentrated in what was now familiar Labour territory (as mentioned above, Ardwick, Bradford, Gorton, New Cross and Openshaw). The 1910 municipal elections proved highly successful for Labour with the party returning 7 councillors. It is worth recognising, however, that most of Labour's majorities were small; 5% (of the total vote cast) in Blackley and Moston and also in Harpurhey, 7% in Gorton North and just one actual vote in

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[218] For a good analysis of the development of working-class neighbourhoods during this period see, M. Savage and A. Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working-Class 1840-1949* (London, 1994), pp. 64-68 and also J. Lawrence, 'The British Sense of Class', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35, 2 (2000).
[219] This excludes wards with three seats.
[220] The essence of the debate related to whether or not a new city art gallery should be built on the site. Labour candidates argued the case for the site to be used for housing and others simply wished it be left as an open public space. This debate persisted for some time.
[221] See speech by W. T. Jackson in *Manchester City News*, 22nd October 1910.

Openshaw (see appendix figs. 82, 88, 86 and 96). Furthermore, the Labour Party evidently found it more difficult when faced with both Liberal and Conservative opponents.[222] In a three-cornered contest in the socially mixed Longsight ward, for example, Labour came bottom of the poll, obtaining 20% of the vote to the Liberal's 36% (see appendix fig. 91) and in New Cross (where there were two seats available) while a Labour candidate was elected the poll was some way behind the Conservatives; by 19% of the vote cast (see appendix fig. 95). In Ardwick, Labour intervention pushed the Liberals into third place, however, allowing the Conservative to sneak in (see appendix fig. 81).[223] The result in Ardwick illustrated the futility of progressive confrontation given that the total anti-Conservative vote amounted to 63% of the vote.[224] Altogether, there was little indication of a great leap forward for Labour. In relation to Liberal-Labour electoral co-operation, it appears that at the 1910 municipal contests, at least, there was some tacit agreement.

Consolidation of the Progressive Alliance at the Municipal Level

After 1906 the Manchester Liberal Federation had become determined to improve the performance of the progressive forces in Manchester's municipal politics. As previously mentioned in 1911 this culminated in the establishment of the Municipal Progressive Association. The role of the MPA was twofold; to assist the associations in finding candidates and to aid essential preparatory work for the municipal contests. In March 1911, for example, the MPA contacted all ward associations, requesting reports on election prospects and urging 'arrangements ... be made'. Scott and Royal were dispatched to Ardwick and St Lukes, areas where the party had experienced difficulties in previous contests and were anxious to improve their position in these wards.[225]Both wards were consequently given financial assistance so candidates could arrange meetings with voters at which they would draw attention to their councillors'

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[222] In 1910, for example, three of the five gains were taken from independents and only two from the established parties.

[223] The Conservative majority over Labour was just 2%. Certainly, without Liberal intervention Labour would have won this seat.

[224] The Conservative majority over Labour was just 45 votes. The respective poll was 33% and 30% for Labour and the Liberals respectively.

[225] *Municipal Progressive Association Executive Committee Minutes*, 10th March 1911. In Ardwick the 1910 municipal contests had seen the Liberals coming bottom of the poll behind both Conservatives and Labour and in St Lukes the independent campaigner J. R. Clynes standing against the Liberal Chairman of the Watch Committee (Thewlis) on a platform of anti-police corruption caused some anxiety.

achievements.[226] The MPA seems to have rendered valuable assistance to the ward associations particularly in organising meetings in the month preceding the municipal elections.[227]

The results of the 1911 elections saw the Conservatives losing 3 seats, 2 to Labour and 1 to the Liberals, Labour having fielded 12 candidates and secured the return of 6 (see appendix figs 104-131). Altogether, the Liberals fielded 15 candidates (9 of which were elected) and there had been just one contest in which the progressives faced each other. This suggests that during this period at least, the MPA might have been influential in averting progressive conflict. The overall composition of the city council now stood at 70 Conservatives, 43 Liberals and 17 Labour representatives. The following year there were contests in just 17 of the 34 wards and a relatively high number of uncontested returns. Two wards stand out in particular. In Harpurhey, a three-cornered fight saw Labour push the Liberals into third place and in Ardwick also the Liberals finished bottom, obtaining just 14% of the vote (see appendix figs 137 and 132).[228] Clearly, attempts to avoid conflict had broken down in this part of the city and unsurprisingly the consequence of a split in the progressive vote was simply to gift the seat to the Conservatives. There appeared to be increasing Labour strength in some parts of the city at the expense of the Liberals. In some working-class wards Labour had clearly become the major anti-Tory party but the party still found it difficult to beat the Conservatives in these wards. As we have seen, it is clear that Labour was strongest in Bradford, Gorton North and Openshaw for the reasons already outlined (for the 1911 results see appendix figs. 106, 112 and 124).

A feature of the municipal elections in Manchester before 1914 was a decreasing numbers of contests each year. The last year of peace saw just 19 seats contested.[229]

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[226] *Municipal Progressive Association Executive Committee Minutes*, 31st July 1911. It was later acknowledged, however, that there had been a lack of interest amongst the retiring 'progressive' members in assisting these meetings although the MPA remained convinced these could serve to promote greater interest in municipal politics generally and also strengthen the position of the Liberal councillors. *Municipal Progressive Association Minutes,* 29th February 1912.

[227] Ibid.

[228] In Harpurhey the Conservatives won with 44% of the vote, Labour came second with 31% and the Liberals last with 24%; in Ardwick the Conservatives secured a significant majority (29% of the vote cast) over the second-placed Labour candidate (who obtained 28% of the vote).

[229] A record number of wards (15) were uncontested. The overall result saw the Liberals gaining 2 seats (Blackley and Moston and St Michaels) and Labour lost one. Note, however, that the Liberals lost Didsbury and Moss Side East.

The Liberals contested 12 seats and won 6. 1913 appears to have been a year of some Liberal recovery in Manchester. Notably, the Liberals managed to win a three-cornered contest in Blackley and Moston (see appendix fig. 150).[230] The *Manchester Guardian* claimed that the progressive forces were making gains against the Conservatives across the city as a whole (i.e. not an inconsiderable achievement after seven years in government). Labour stood in just six wards (with 8 candidates) 4 of which were returned. Two of these were returning members (in Gorton North and Openshaw) whilst the other two (in Longsight and Gorton South) were new members (see appendix figs. 153, 160, 155 and 154). The progressive forces in 1913 therefore had achieved a good strike rate when one considers the small number of candidates and the overall results.

Exclusive focus upon municipal representation might suggest that Labour remained peripheral to the city's municipal politics. Yet, this was certainly not the case. On the contrary, analysis of the Manchester city council's monthly meetings illustrates that the new Labour group, albeit small in number, had a significant impact on the character of municipal debate. As in other parts of the country, one of the key issues the Labour group campaigned upon throughout the period was that of wages, especially those of municipal employees. In Manchester the Labour group and its leader Tom Fox in particular, proved to be remarkably capable advocates of issues including wage capping, standardisation and right to work. 1909 arguably marked a turning point in the role of the Labour members on the city council. From this point onwards, Labour members' regular interventions within the council debates not only brought the issue of wages to the council agenda but they managed to win a number of key votes on the question.[231] In February 1909, for example, a proposal to instruct all the council's committees to refrain from any wage increases for a year was successfully defeated after Labour intervention.[232] A month later a proposed increase in salaries was also defeated and on this occasion it was reported that the majority against was so large 'no-one asked for a count'.[233] Labour's interjections on other labour issues also received surprisingly positive responses. Later in 1909, for

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[230] The Liberals won with 5% majority over the second placed Conservative whilst Labour came third obtaining 27% of the vote.
[231] *Manchester Guardian*, 8th August 1909.
[232] On this occasion the Labour groups Joseph Billam won the argument in support of wage increases and the council voted 54 to 28 against limiting wages. *Manchester Guardian*, 4th February 1909.
[233] *Manchester Guardian*, 4th March 1909.

example, James Johnston's (Labour) proposal that a committee be established to consider an eight hour day and forty hour week for all corporation workers was agreed by 53 to 18 votes.[234] The Labour group clearly benefited on these occasions from the support of Liberal members as well as a number of Conservatives, especially those representing working-class wards. Nonetheless, it had been the Labour group which had taken the lead on the issue. Throughout 1910, during which there had been a series of mass demonstrations across the city, it is noticeable that the Labour group became increasingly critical of the city council's inaction with regards to the question of unemployment. Owing to its refusal to appeal for public funds, the Distress Committee in particular was accused of failing to deal with the problem. Unsurprisingly, the issue was taken up strongly by the Labour group on the city council. Partly as a result of Labour's intervention, the Manchester City Council embarked upon a series of initiatives to relieve unemployment. As can be seen, analysis of the Labour Party within the City Council suggests that from about 1909 the group clearly began to assert itself as a distinctive and capable force. Unsurprisingly, the group tended to focus on issues such as wages and unemployment yet since these were all issues with an immediate relevance they allowed the fledgling Labour group to make its presence felt. Yet, it might be suggested that this presence remained very much within the council chamber, i.e. less among the electorate. By focusing so much attention to the question municipal wages the perception that Labour existed as a sectional party with an interest which did not essentially extend beyond trade unionism might have simply been reinforced. This did not sit comfortably with the fact that in some parts of Manchester the greater majority of electors were not members of trade union.

Examination of council politics in Manchester prior to the outbreak of war also proves illustrative in relation to determining the extent to which there existed a 'progressive alliance' at the municipal level. Despite no formal alliance between the parties, analysis of voting patterns of the Liberal and Labour groups at the monthly meetings suggests that after 1906 there clearly developed a 'progressive bloc' insofar as the parties regularly voted together. The parties shared similar aims and objectives on social reform so, united, the progressive forces could pose a threat to the

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[234] *Manchester Guardian*, 5th September 1909.

Conservative's domination of the council chamber. Of course, one implication of this, however, was that it might have disadvantaged Labour in the sense that it made it difficult for the party to present a distinct appeal and separate identity. Whilst the Labour Party was becoming more assertive and intent on widening its municipal role, both the electorate and the established parties might have continued to regard it as little more than a pressure group and adjunct of the Liberal Party.

Conclusions: Municipal Politics in Manchester, 1906-1914.

For some historians electoral developments in municipal politics before 1914 provide evidence of an identifiable Labour advance.[235] McHugh contends that Labour made 'smooth progress' in Manchester before 1914 and the party's 'popularity and 'rise' (admittedly concentrated in the working-class districts of the city) was already 'cemented' by that point; post-war success was thus founded upon an advance made before the outbreak of war.[236] Other writers, however, contend that there is little evidence to support the view that the Labour Party was significantly advancing at the municipal level before 1914.[237] Analysis of voting patterns in Manchester's municipal contests between 1906 and 1913 provide a valuable insight into the strength of the respective parties. The evidence in Manchester does not appear to suggest an imminent advance for the Labour Party. Where Labour faced both Conservative and Liberal opponents its performance was generally poor and in areas of the city where popular Conservatism remained strong it experienced difficulties in establishing itself on the municipal landscape. Of the 16 contests (from a total of 167) which saw both Liberal and Labour candidates at the municipal elections before 1914, Labour managed to outpoll the Liberals on 7 occasions but the party was able to win just

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232 See R. McKibbin, *Evolution of the Labour Party*, p. 85; M.G. Sheppard and J. L. Halstead, 'Labour's Municipal Election Performance in Provincial England and Wales, 1900-1913', *Bulletin of the Society of the Study for Labour History* (1979) and K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of* Labour (London, 1984).

236 See D. McHugh, 'The Labour Party in Manchester and Salford before the First World War: A Case of Unequal Development', *Manchester Region History Review,* 14 (2000), pp. 15-23 and 'Labour, the Liberals and the Progressive Alliance', *Northern History*, 2002, 39 (1) pp. 93-108. McHugh's account of Labour's 'onward march' in Manchester, however, appears unconvincing and he provides little evidence to support the assertion that the party's position was really 'cemented' by 1914 although he shows how Labour's position there was slightly better than in neighbouring Salford.

237 See C. Cook, Labour and the Downfall of the Liberal Party 1906-1914 in A. Sked and C. Cook, *Crisis and Controversy*, p. 58; T. Adams, 'Liberals, Labour and the First World War'; A. W. Purdue, 'Liberal and Labour Parties in North East Politics'; M. Pugh, 'Yorkshire and the New Liberalism' and D. Tanner, *Political* Change, pp. 157-158, 275-278 and 300-303.

twice.[238] Progressive conflict simply served to gift the seats to the Conservatives. Of the 13 wards which saw multi-party contests involving Conservatives against Liberal and Labour opponents, the Conservatives were returned in ten. This was a striking reminder of the necessity of progressive co-operation at the municipal level.

It could be suggested that the number of candidates put forward is in itself an indicator of party strength or at least ambition. While the number of Labour candidates did increase after 1909 (when the party fielded 9 candidates) this had fallen back to just 5 in 1913. This represented a negligible improvement on the 7 of 1906. It could be argued that fewer candidates reflected a more selective targeting of wards, although if this was the case the tactic was not necessarily successful. The position of the Labour Party in Manchester's municipal politics appears to have been fragile to say the least. Equally, however, the Liberals also appear to have been in a somewhat precarious position. Whilst the Liberal share of the municipal vote remained relatively stable the party suffered increasing numbers of defeats in areas where it had previously been successful; in Withington, Exchange and Rusholme for example (see appendix figs. 13, 37 and 97). Analysis of Liberal versus Conservative contests, however, shows that often the vote could be extremely close (see appendix figs. 37, 50, 59, 85 and 11 for example).

Given the spatial character of party support it is unsurprising that the local Liberal Federation appeared anxious to establish some form of municipal entente (similar to the Progressive Alliance at the parliamentary level) in Manchester. In 1911 this became enshrined within the context of the Municipal Progressive Association. The evidence suggests, however, that the MPA never induced any significant results in relation to progressive co-operation in respect to policy formation and the Manchester Liberals themselves admitted that the general response to the initiative had been disappointing.[239]

In relation to the geographical distribution of party support, as we have seen, the Labour Party was advancing in the 'better' working-class districts to the east of the

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[238] These were Harpurhey in 1907 and New Cross in 1910. Note that this figure excludes Gorton South in 1909 where three seats were available and both a Labour and Liberal candidate were returned.
[239] *Municipal Progressive Association Minutes*, 19th February 1912.

city such as Gorton, Openshaw and Bradford (the Bye-Law category in T. H. Marr's study)[240] whilst Liberalism continued to prosper in the more affluent middle-class suburbs such as Withington, Didsbury, All Saints and St. Clements and the socially mixed wards (Cheetham, Newton Heath and Moss Side East). Longsight might be seen as a particular victory for the MPA. The Conservatives had won the seat easily between 1907 and 1910 (in the context of four successive three-cornered contests all of which had seen the Liberals outperforming Labour). Yet, in 1911 the Liberals withdrew in favour of Labour and thereafter the gap became progressively narrower with the Labour Party eventually capturing the seat in 1913.

The Conservatives appear to have been particularly strong in the working-class wards concentrated in the centre and the north of the city (Medlock Street, New Cross, Miles Platting, St. John's and Ardwick) and, in fact, appear to have been becoming stronger in some districts. Altogether, it seems that the respective parties had developed in such a way that their appeal was spatial but in relation to the overall composition of the Manchester City Council there is little evidence that any great transformation was imminent. Even in districts where the Labour Party might have appeared to have been making some headway development remained tentative; for example, the LRC had won Ardwick as early as 1904 and again in 1906 but had thereafter only been able to win there once between 1907 and 1913 (in 1911).

In Manchester, overall control of the city council remained a distant prospect for Labour; as has been seen, the new party's electoral advance was extremely tentative. Yet this ought not to be taken to imply that the Labour Party's impact upon municipal politics was altogether limited. On the contrary, despite possessing just 16 elected councillors on the Manchester City Council (less than an eighth of its total membership) the Labour group was not of peripheral significance. Analysis of council proceedings before 1914 reveals that the new Labour group asserted itself in a confident and positive manner. The party itself believed that the value of its municipal representatives remained to be fully appreciated (largely because the results were 'not immediately visible to the public eye'.[241] Nonetheless, the group persisted and 'more

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[240] See T. H. Marr, *Housing Conditions in Manchester and Salford* (Manchester, 1904).
[241] See, *Manchester and Salford Labour Representation Committee Annual Report*, 1911.

than held their own in the debates'.[242] The period after 1911 in particular saw a growing number of labour disputes within Manchester and the subject of wages and conditions of work were of great significance. The Labour members took the lead on these questions. One councillor in particular (William Phillips) stands out. Phillips put forward a large number of motions; in May 1912 he led the opposition to the Shop Hours Act successfully winning recognised rates for municipal painters. The following year he obtained improvements in relation to wage rates for municipal workers including engineers and other kindred trades.[243] He courted controversy largely owing to the language he used (it was often somewhat provocative to say the least) and the appearance of representatives like him served to politicise the council chamber in a way that had never previously been the case. [244] From this point, a frequent criticism of Labour began to emerge; that the party represented too narrow a sectional interest. Some even claimed that the Labour members were effectively 'paid agitators' seeking municipal representation in order only to 'advocate an increase in wages'.[245] Whilst pronounced hostility towards Labour was rare before 1914 it nonetheless illustrates some of the difficulties faced by the new organisation. Another obstacle in the way of Labour's progress in municipal politics during the earlier stages of its development was in connection to the party's limited representation on the council committees. Effectively, the council committees were where much of the critical work took place and Labour's (as yet) poor representation limited the party's ability to exert an influence on policy.[246] Even so, the Labour representatives on the city council had played a critical role in improving the conditions of many workers. Despite on occasion determined opposition within the council chamber Labour amendments were regularly decisive in securing improvements. The central Labour Party in Manchester itself believed that 'no section of workers had benefited more by Labour representation' than the municipal workers. At the same time, however, it was

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[242] This was the view of the Manchester LRC (cited in ibid.) and is supported by the present study.
[243] See *Manchester Guardian*, 2nd May 1912 and 7th March 1913.
[244] Even the Labour group's leader, Tom Fox, openly condemned Phillips making the point that he was not a trade unionist. It is clear that there existed some degree of disunity within the Labour group's ranks between the traditional trade unionists and the more recently elected ILP members.
[245] See a particularly heated debate in December 1912 which centred on whether skilled employees such as engineers (amongst others) ought to be paid higher than the standard rate. Labour's response to accusations of them representing only sectional interest was to accuse the established parties of being 'the paid advocates of the property owners'. *Manchester Guardian,* 5th December 1912. Tellingly, this meeting saw Labour's largest defeat to date; Labour's amendment was lost by 73 to 23 votes, see also report in *Manchester Guardian,* 9th January 1913.
[246] *Manchester Central Labour Party, Annual Report,* 1911.

recognised that 'no other unions gave less support to the party than those who are largely employed by the corporation'.[247] Whilst it was perhaps inevitable that the early Labour councillors would concern themselves with municipal wages and such like (the municipal corporation after-all was one of the major employers in the city) such focus might prove to be a double-edged sword however since it might serve to reinforce the notion that Labour was, indeed, simply representative of a sectional interest.

Some historians have suggested that progressive co-operation at the municipal level lends support to the view that the Progressive Alliance (more generally) remained strong up to 1914. This study of Manchester suggests that the politics of the Progressive Alliance at the municipal level was complicated. Whilst the local Liberal Federation remained eager to reach an understanding with Labour at the municipal level (in terms of policy) it appears that Labour remained generally unresponsive to such overtures. If anything, the Labour Party appeared most independent in the council chamber and (to a slightly lesser extent) at the municipal elections. It was in municipal politics that a drive for truly independent labour representation was most pronounced although it is wise not to exaggerate the point. With regards to the municipal elections, it could be suggested that Labour 'progressives' faced the same problem as the *MPA*, in that with such a huge number of seats to 'police', it was perhaps inevitable that some of the local parties would ignore party advice and stand a candidate in their wards rather than make way for the Liberals (even if the Liberals were better positioned in the ward than Labour). Clearly, there were some seats, noticeably Harpurhey, where all parties appeared absolutely determined to fight almost every year.[248] Ultimately, however, whilst the numbers of three-cornered contests might have increased slightly in the years just before the outbreak of war, they still remained the exception to the rule. The evidence suggests that there clearly remained many wards where both parties (Liberal and Labour) appeared to have been prepared to stand aside and give their progressive ally a free-run against the Conservatives. Before 1914, therefore, contests between Liberals and Conservatives

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[247] See *Manchester Central Labour Party Annual Report,* 1914.

[248] Note that the MPA intimated that it would 'give full support to any candidate the Harpurhey Liberal Association may adopt', suggesting that, here, at least, the MPA did not intend to intervene in order to achieve progressive unity, see *Municipal Progressive Association Minute*, 20th January and 2nd February 1913.

and Labour and Conservatives were far more common than those between the Liberal and Labour parties.[249]

The extent to which the MPA reflected actual Liberal-Labour alliance within the council chamber is more problematic and we need exercise caution not to over-state progressive 'co-operation' in this respect. Whilst the odd 'moderate' Labour councillor (such as John Sutton) might have put in an occasional appearance at MPA meetings, these were few and far between.[250] The Labour group on the council appeared to be deeply committed to their own organisations, whether these were political such as the ILP or their respective trade unions. On the council the Labour members focused principally on the practical aspects of municipal representation, i.e. improving the lives of their working-class constituents, most particularly the municipal employees and there were many areas on which the two progressive parties could agree although there was never a formal 'alliance' as such. In relation to electoral politics the evidence in Manchester suggests that, tacitly at least, the politics of the Progressive Alliance remained more or less intact on the eve of the First World War.

2.6: Conclusions: Electoral Politics and Party Support in Manchester, 1906-1914

Tanner suggests that Labour's electoral development before 1914 was fragmented and largely dependent upon Liberal acquiescence.[251] In his view the Labour Party's early progress was highly concentrated; in areas with significant trade union membership, and even in these areas there was not always an identifiable swing to Labour at this stage.[252] In Manchester, Labour's support was indeed heavily concentrated in the north-east and east of the city; areas where trade union organisation was strong which benefited Labour's organisation substantially. Elsewhere, politics in poorer districts of Manchester remained dominated by either deeply-embedded popular Conservatism or

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[249] For an alternative view on this see D. McHugh, 'The Labour Party in Manchester and Salford before the First World War: A Case of Unequal Development', *Manchester Region History Review*, 14 (2000).

[250] The only Labour councillor in Manchester who appears to have taken any interest in the MPA was the moderate Lib-Laber John Sutton.

[251] D. Tanner, *Political Change*, pp. 317-337, see also D. Tanner, 'The Parliamentary Electoral System, the Fourth Reform Act and the Rise of Labour in England and Wales', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 56, 1983 and also D. Tanner, 'Class Voting and Radical Politics: The Liberal and Labour Parties, 1910-1931' in J. Lawrence and M. Taylor (eds), *Party, State and Society*.

[252] D. Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 398.

by Liberalism and there appeared little evidence in either municipal or parliamentary politics that these traditional loyalties were about to change. In his study of the Labour Party in Manchester after 1918 McHugh argues that Labour's popularity and 'rise' (which he admits was concentrated in the working-class districts of the city) was 'cemented' by 1914 and post-war success was founded upon progress made prior to this.[253] Indeed, the Labour Party had made significant electoral progress in Manchester at the parliamentary level before 1914, but this had been facilitated by a considerable degree of Liberal acquiescence and, as this study shows, Labour in Manchester was exceptionally similar to the Liberals in respect to policy and ideology. Ultimately, Labour's wider progress appeared painfully slow and little evidence exists to suggest the emergence of a powerful and distinct Labour appeal on the basis of policy. This examination of Manchester confirms the view that Labour's advance was by no means assured before 1914 and at best the party's prospects appeared tenuous. Claims that the seeds of future Labour growth were well in place before 1914 appear to rest on slim foundations when one considers electoral politics and political change in Manchester before 1914. When Labour did challenge the Liberal Party it tended to fare badly. Its position in the more unionised parts of the city seems to have been more secure in the years before the outbreak of war, but only slightly; as analysis of Clynes' position illustrates, Labour continued to face deeply-entrenched popular working-class Conservatism in this type of district.

Tanner's work in particular contends that the Liberal and Labour parties remained committed to the Progressive Alliance on the eve of war in 1914. Other historians, however, have sought to emphasise that there appeared to exist irreconcilable differences by that stage.[254] This study illustrates how, in Manchester, there were clearly a number of occasions when relations broke down before 1914 yet such instances should not necessarily be perceived as indicative of a wider and more serious collapse of the Progressive Alliance though it is important to recognise that the longer-term durability of progressive co-operation remains more of an open question.

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[253] See D. McHugh, 'Labour, the Liberals and the Progressive Alliance', *Northern History*, 2002, 39 (1) pp. 93-108.

[254] However, Tanner later suggests that Labour was unlikely to be happy to remain the junior partner in the Progressive Alliance and 'beneath the surface attempted to gradually expand its base and to replace its progressive ally', see D. Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 345.

As this study illustrates, it is unwise to exaggerate the permeation of New Liberalism in Manchester. Apart from exceptions such as Arthur Haworth and C. T. Needham, Manchester's Liberal parliamentary candidates before 1914 campaigned overwhelmingly on a traditional, some might suggest, mundane political platform. Most continued, somewhat dogmatically, to focus principally on the question of Free Trade at the expense of virtually all other issues. Early twentieth century Liberalism did not possess a dynamic edge in Manchester as it might have begun to in other areas. When compared to Stoke-on-Trent (which will be discussed below), Manchester Liberalism was markedly less radical and dynamic prior to 1914. In Manchester it appears that the Liberal Party was beginning to lose its radical edge even before the outbreak of war. This is not to suggest that the party was losing ideological momentum to Labour; far from it, the Labour Party locally appeared to be as moderate as the Liberals. Instead, the Liberal Party in Manchester seems simply to have become too embroiled with the issue of defeating Tariff Reform and the majority of the party's candidates appeared to lack the dynamism we would associate with New Liberalism and a city with such a glorious Liberal past.[255] On the eve of war, Liberalism in Manchester remained electorally significant but it did not appear ideologically vibrant; the extent to which it would be able to deal with future challenges will be discussed below.

Detailed evaluation of the electoral campaigns in Manchester before 1914 highlights how local specificity remained critically important during the Edwardian period. As analysis of election campaigns illustrates, in Manchester, the traditional Liberal issue of Free Trade remained central to the party's electoral platform and the impact of the New Liberalism appears to have been limited to a relatively small number of candidates. This provides little support to a number of historian's contentions that the period prior to 1914 heralded an altogether new era for Liberalism on the basis of the permeation of a new Liberal radicalism.

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[255] Historians such as Moore have emphasised the progressivism of the Liberal Party in Manchester during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and stressed how Manchester itself came to symbolise much of the New Liberalism of the next century, see J. R. Moore, *Transformation*.

Chapter 3: Constituency Politics in Stoke-on-Trent, 1906-1914

3.1: Political Context and the Emergence of a Progressive Alliance[1]

Before 1880 the Potteries had been an undivided constituency with two members. Sometimes two Liberals had been returned, on other occasions a Liberal and a Conservative, although the area appeared more Liberal than Conservative. With redistribution in 1880, Hanley and Burslem were formed into one constituency under the title of Hanley Parliamentary Borough and a separate seat was created for the nearby town of Stoke-upon-Trent (hereafter referred to as Stoke). Stoke was subsequently captured by the Liberals for three successive general elections (1885, 1886 and 1892) and at a by-election in between (in 1890). On all occasions the Liberal vote had been high; in percentage terms 63%, 61%, 59% and 62%.[2] In 1895 the seat was won by a Liberal Unionist on a narrow majority (of 2.4%). In Hanley, all four general elections saw the return of a Liberal (four were contested, 1886 was unopposed) and like Stoke, the Liberal vote had been high (69%, 59%, 52%).[3] In consequence of the Boer War, as across the country, the area saw a Unionist landslide in 1900 and for the first time since redistribution both seats returned Unionists. The Unionist majorities were small however; 2% in Stoke and 5.2% in Hanley.

An effect of the 1900 general election (as elsewhere) was that it prompted the Liberals to reassess their position in the district. At this time organised labour was also beginning to examine its position. This primarily entailed the miners considering the viability of an independent challenge although the Liberals had already begun to consider the feasibility of a formal 'progressive' coalition with labour, believing the potential electoral appeal of such an alliance would be extremely significant. From this period a distinct Lib-Labism in North Staffordshire had started to develop and from it emerged a particularly distinctive type of Lib-Lab representative.

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[1] For examination of the 'creation' of the national 'progressive alliance' (the 1903 Lib-Lab pact) see F. Bealey, 'Negotiations between the Liberal Party and Labour Representation Committee before the General Election of 1906', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* (1956) and for the working of the pact see also F. Bealey and H. Pelling, *Labour and Politics; A History of the Labour Representation Committee* (London, 1958) pp. 298-299.

[2] The majorities (in percentages) were 26.2%, 21.8%, 17.4% and 23.8%. Figures from F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1885-1918*, p. 196 and p. 118.

Initially, the Liberal Party had to deal with inevitable dissenters: those for whom accommodation with the labour interest implied a belief that the party might be taken over by socialists. Despite some misgivings, however, in April 1902 a representative meeting of local Liberal and Labour forces was convened in Stoke to determine the 'advisability of fighting the seat on labour and progressive lines ...providing a suitable candidate [were to be] forthcoming.[4] One month later, the decision was taken to adopt John Ward as a prospective parliamentary candidate. Ward had an interesting political past; he had been a member of the SDF in Battersea during the 1880s, became chairman of the Battersea branch of the Gas Workers' Union and in the same year had also been involved in the creation of the Navvies, Bricklayers', Labourers' and General Labourers' Union. From this point, however, he had adopted a more Liberal stance and had become active in the National Democratic League (becoming the organisation's chairman in 1902).[5] Ward arrived in Stoke in early 1902 with the hope of obtaining the LRC nomination there. Crucially, he made explicit efforts to obtain an electoral agreement with the Liberals in the area. This situation antagonised some elements within the local Labour movement although the relative weakness of the LRC in Stoke essentially meant they were unable to mount effective opposition to his candidature.[6]

For the radical wing of the Stoke Liberals, Ward represented an ideal candidate; a progressive who, it was believed, could help sustain, if not strengthen even, the Liberal position in the area. Some local Liberals, however, clearly believed the position to be untenable; moreover, they believed the seat could in any case be held by the Liberal Party alone, without Labour support. In July 1902 a meeting of the North Staffordshire Liberal Association resolved to adopt a Liberal candidate in opposition to Ward.[7] It was hoped the prospective candidate would be Alfred Billson (a leading light of North Staffordshire Liberalism). Billson was Gladstonian in outlook although he did appear anxious to promote a policy of social reform and considered an accommodation with the working class interest as essential. Billson needed extra time to consider his position,

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[3] The majorities were 38.2, 18.6 (in 1892), and 2.6% (1895). The Liberal vote had held up better in Stoke than in Hanley although the Liberals narrowly lost the seat in Stoke in 1895.

[4] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3rd May 1902.

[5] See J. M. Bellamy and J. Saville, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol.4 (London, 1977), p. 193. The National Democratic Federation had been formed in 1900 in an attempt to promote unity between radicals and trade unionists. In 1903 it attempted to affiliate to the LRC but this was refused because of its (alleged) Liberal ties, see also *Labour Leader*, 9th August 1902.

[6] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3rd May 1902.

however, and in January the following year he decided to decline the invitation to contest the constituency on the grounds that local unity was more important.[8] It seems possible that the national party applied pressure on the Staffordshire Liberals to allow Ward a free-run. By the beginning of 1903, therefore, some form of 'progressive alliance' had been established in Stoke, although the degree to which it was purely ideologically motivated or entirely supported by the Liberals in the town remained uncertain. At the local level an accommodation of the Labour interest may have allowed the Liberal Party to secure its long-term electoral position; it could enhance its image as a party committed to representing the working class interest and it could also help the party improve its local organisation.

Whilst Hanley was not an exclusively mining constituency, the miners formed the most powerful bloc within the town's politics and shaped its development more so than any other single group. The North Staffordshire miners represented a moderate force and were unlikely to be at the forefront of demands for radical political change. Gregory cites the miners in this district as the 'laggards' of the wider movement away from Liberal patronage.[9] So, conflict between Liberals and Labour in Hanley was less likely. Furthermore, the potters (the predominant occupational group in the town) also remained loyal to Liberalism.[10]

As part of Gladstone's overhaul of the party organisation in the summer of 1903 the local Liberal organisations were re-structured culminating in the inauguration of the North Staffordshire Liberal Federation. This marked the end of a long period with fairly inadequate organisation in the area. Improved organisation possibly also served to encourage a more united front for the Liberals and Labour. From Labour's perspective this was more eager than some might have expected. Many Labour supporters it seems welcomed further ties with the Liberal Party: some even believing a pursuit of independent labour representation was an entirely inappropriate route.[11] A shared

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[7] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 14th July 1902.

[8] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 13th October 1906.

[9] See R. Gregory, *Miners and British Politics*, pp. 168-173.

[10] See H. Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections, 1885-1910* (London, 1967), pp. 270-274 and R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour: Work and Social Change in the Pottery Industry* (London, 1990), p. 181.

[11] For example, in 1904, the President of the North Staffordshire Trades and Labour Council (John Welsh) suggested his organisation should disaffiliate from the LRC. More significantly this proposal was only defeated by 24 votes to 16; see *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 4th December 1904.

interest in similar issues helped the process of co-operation between the Liberals and Labour in the locality. By 1906 some of the earlier tensions had disappeared and an impression of Liberal-Labour unity was thus presented to electors. Crucially, issues as they now emerged further encouraged a unified Liberal-Labour political outlook. The Boer War especially united advanced Liberals and Labour. Certainly, a section of the local Labour movement did not favour co-operation with the Liberals and the local ILP branches contained elements hostile to any involvement with Liberalism. The greater proportion of the Labour movement continued to support the idea of a 'progressive alliance'.

Another aspect which served to underpin working-class loyalty to the Liberal Party in North Staffordshire was the predominance of religious nonconformity. At the turn of the century nonconformists, with very few exceptions, voted for the Liberal Party virtually as an article of faith. Without a nonconformist revival, the post 1900 resurgence of Liberalism would have been far less pronounced. Nonconformity alone did not account for the 1906 landslide but it went a long way in determining the character and extent of it. In an area such as North Staffordshire where nonconformity was exceptionally strong amongst the working class so too, one might assume, would be the Liberal revival that, in part, it created. Religious feeling in North Staffordshire continued to remain strong and, as will be seen, politicians remained mindful of this fact for some time.

Nonconformity was also fundamental to the development and character of Labour politics in North Staffordshire. In the first instance, courting the nonconformist interest was imperative if Labour was to advance in an area where nonconformity and Liberalism were so entrenched. However, the relationship between nonconformity and Labour politics was an organic one. The chapels had already become the springboard for a generation of trade union activists and became the connecting point between Liberalism and trade unionism and then (conversely) between Liberalism and Labour. Virtually all Labour's early representatives in North Staffordshire were active nonconformists (usually staunch Methodists) and their religion informed their politics

as much as their class or occupation did.[12] Experience as lay preachers gave trade union activists invaluable experience on the public platform; it also encouraged a strong relationship with the local Liberal elite.

In Stoke-on-Trent (as elsewhere) Liberals locally were extremely anxious to improve on the party's electoral position and from the outset the 1906 general election campaign was conducted amidst an air of tangible optimism. In spite of the earlier wrangle over his candidature, John Ward had managed to secure the Liberal-Labour nomination in Stoke and in the neighbouring constituency of Hanley, Enoch Edwards (president of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain) stood again as a Liberal-Labour candidate. Edwards had been a working miner until he had been injured in an accident in the early 1870s after which he had embarked upon a career as a trade union organiser. In 1878 he had become treasurer of the North Staffordshire Miners' Federation and eight years later he took over as president. In 1904 he became president of the national Miners' Federation of Great Britain. His career in local politics had begun in 1886 when he had been elected to the Burslem Town Council, becoming Alderman nine years later (he also served as Mayor during 1899).[13] Throughout his political life Edwards remained a moderate Lib-Laber and no doubt this was deeply connected to his staunch Primitive Methodism. Edwards had first been put forward as a prospective miner's candidate in 1892 for Newcastle-Under-Lyme but the local Liberal Association had refused to endorse him and he subsequently withdrew.[14] In 1900 he had been adopted as a MFGB-Liberal candidate in Hanley but had encountered some hostility owing to his opposition to the Boer War.[15] In 1906 the Liberals agreed to support Ward and Edwards on the condition that the Labour organisations would assist Liberal campaigns in Newcastle-under-Lyme, North-West Staffordshire and Leek.[16] Edwards and Ward received substantial assistance from the North Staffordshire Trades' and Labour Council (the council's chairman, H. Emery, acted as vice-president of Edwards's

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[12] Smith argues the contention that there was 'more Methodism than Marxism' in early Labour politics is rather misguided and, in fact, Methodism had much less of a role than is commonly assumed, see Smith, *Religion and the Rise of Labour* (Keele, 1993), p.166-167. In this region, however, Methodism was fundamental to early Labour politics. Such high profile Labour representatives as Albert Stanley, for example, continued to preach at the Bethesda Chapel, see *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 7th March 1908.

[13] Biographical details cited in J. M. Bellamy and J. Saville, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Volume 3 (London, 1976), pp.109-111.

[14] See R. Gregory, *Miners and British Politics*, p. 168.

[15] The Liberals had initially believed that it would be more appropriate for Edwards to stand in North West Staffordshire since there were more miners in that area but Edwards had refused, ibid p.168.

election committee). That both Edwards and Ward's campaigns represented the combined forces of Liberalism and Labour was reflected by the formation of a joint Liberal-Labour election committee for the duration of the contest.[17]

As already mentioned, after 1895 the Potteries can be viewed as a solidly Liberal area: of the four general elections from 1885, Hanley had only returned a Conservative once (in the abnormal circumstances of 1900) while in Stoke five elections (including a by-election) had seen Unionists returned twice (although with extremely narrow majorities). Yet, it would be unwise to perceive Conservatism as of peripheral importance. There existed significant pockets of Conservative support in the area; one reflection of the strength of Conservatism was membership of the Primrose League for example. Whilst membership of the league was never especially large in North Staffordshire, as Pugh identifies, all the Potteries seats reveal some Primrose League strength. Hanley, Stoke and Fenton all had very active habitations. Of course, here, popular Conservatism was virtually exclusively working-class.[18] Given the very limited amount of information available about popular Conservatism in the Potteries it is difficult to make an accurate assessment about its wider influence. However, throughout the period studied here it appears that popular working-class Conservatism was well organised as reports on, for example, the Unionist Workingmen's Association testify.

3.2: The 1906 General Election in Stoke-on-Trent

As across the country the Liberal-Labour campaigns focused upon the principal themes of Free Trade, Chinese Slavery, Trade Union legislation (in particular the Miners' Bill) and demands for amendment of the Workers' Compensation Act. Alongside these aspects, the two Liberal-Labour candidates focused attention to a number of social issues such as old age pensions and education.

Throughout the contest the central plank of Edwards's campaign was the issue of Free Trade although he did consider a small number of other issues such as pensions and

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[16] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 1st and 16th January 1906.
[17] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 21st December 1905.
[18] See M. Pugh, *The Tories and the People* (Oxford, 1985) p. 118.

unemployment.[19] Edwards argued that pauperism had increased substantially during the period of the late government and he told voters that whilst the Conservative administration had been able to find £250 million for war in South Africa 'men who had been good citizens were facing the prospect of the workhouse'.[20] He declared: 'if the highest in the land did not believe it below their dignity to accept a pension why shouldn't the working man?'[21] Edwards conducted a more traditional Liberal campaign than Ward. Furthermore, he made a point of avoiding all discussion of his own trade during the campaign and in general devoted little attention to labour questions. Ward offered far more detailed consideration of a much wider number of issues.

In Stoke, John Ward conducted an impressive campaign and addressed a much wider array of issues than any other candidate across the two localities considered within the present study. For no obvious reason, the local press chose to refer to him simply as the Labour candidate although it was made clear that he was endorsed by and received the active support of the local Liberals.[22] Ward did adopt a more discernibly 'Labour' stance than Edwards, however, articulating his arguments in more decisively anti-capitalist/anti-Tory language and he attacked his opponent much more directly. In considering the increasingly precarious economic position of the working man, for instance, he told one meeting how 'the friends of the Tories; the capitalists, the clergy and the brewers [had] taken the cream of the extra taxation raised by the hard labour of the working man'.[23] Edwards never used this sort of language. Throughout the campaign, Ward reiterated how the constituency's Unionist member had 'always voted against the interests of the workers' in parliament.[24] He told electors how Coghill 'instead of representing [this] purely working-class constituency.... had never had any sympathy with the working man'[25] and he even went so far as to suggest that the sitting

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[19] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2nd, 4th, 16th January 1906.
[20] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2nd January 1906.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Throughout the campaign prominent local Liberals regularly supported Ward on his election platforms. The Liberal candidate for Leek, R Pearce, for example, gave Ward significant support as did the local Liberal agent H Leese.
[23] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2nd January 1906.
[24] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4th January 1906.
[25] On labour questions in general it appears that the sitting member's record was somewhat out of step with the character of the constituency; he had voted against the Shop Hours Bill, against the consideration of the wages for post office employees, had contributed to the defeat of the Railway Accidents Prevention Bill and had declared that he supported the Taff Vale decision, see *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6th January 1906.

member appeared 'peculiarly hostile to all labour proposals' in the House of Commons and thus (he argued) it was 'very illogical for Tory working men to support such a candidate; in fact it was absolutely inconsistent'.[26] Another subject which provided Ward with ammunition against his opponent was the issue of Ireland. The constituency contained a sizable Irish population.[27] Coghill had allegedly accused the Irish of 'disloyal, treacherous and treasonable behaviour'.[28] Ward went so far as to contend that his opponent's hostility towards Ireland reached 'almost a mania'.[29] Another issue he focused considerable attention to was education, asserting that the late government had had 'no mandate to interfere with the national education system... [they had] foisted voluntary schools upon the public funds without giving the people proportionate control over the management of [the] schools [and] the Education Act was not a solution to the problems [because it simply] gave privileges to certain sects [whilst placing] the cost of sectarian teaching upon the public funds'.[30] Ward appeared particularly passionate about this particular issue and throughout the campaign reiterated how he firmly believed that all state-aided institutions should be under absolute public control. He also objected strongly to religious tests for teachers. This was an issue likely to strike a chord with the nonconformist Liberal supporters in the constituency and was likely to reinforce their endorsement for him. It could, however, have potentially alienated him from the Catholic Irish and Anglicans however. Ward also gave considerable attention to the subject of Chinese Slavery in South Africa and he even went so far as to suggest 'war had only been waged to secure cheap labour' and that the 'real object of importing Chinese labour was to keep out trade unions.'[31] He also told voters that if such cruelty had been introduced in 'one part of the Empire there was no reason why it shouldn't be introduced at home' and he remained fervent in insisting that 'the principle must be fought and the stain in South Africa wiped from the British flag'.[32]

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[26] By which he meant that it was inconsistent for a man to pay into a trade union then vote for someone who believed it acceptable that the 'great capitalist monopolies' could take the money the union had accumulated for benevolent purposes away.

[27] According to one Nationalist leader, the Irish in the area formed a 'compact and numerous' community in the constituency, cited in H. Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910* (London and New York), p. 271.

[28] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2nd January 1906.

[29] Coghill had also voted against his party in opposing the Irish Land Bill.

[30] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2nd January 1906.

[31] Ibid.

Edwards and Ward both adopted a strong defence of Free Trade although it played less of a central theme for Ward than it did for Edwards. Ward made the simple though nonetheless effective point that under Chamberlain's Tariff Reform proposals just because employers might get higher prices for their goods it did not necessarily follow that they would consequently pay higher wages.[33] It should be noted, however, that the Tariff Reform issue never dominated the political debate in North Staffordshire to the extent which it did elsewhere. As noted earlier, in Manchester, Liberal and Labour candidates adopted the Free Trade v Protection debate as an essential plank of policy (aimed at securing the working class vote as much as retaining traditional middle-class support). In Stoke-on-Trent, as has been seen, whilst the progressive candidates declared themselves Free-Traders, they never made the issue a key plank of their platforms although, conversely, throughout the period studied here, every single one of the Unionist candidates declared themselves to be out-and-out Tariff Reformers arguing their case from the perspective that a degree of tariff protection would be of especial benefit to the pottery industry. It was widely perceived that British pottery was increasingly coming under threat from Germany and Austria and the Staffordshire pottery manufacturers in particular were vocal in their support for fiscal reform.[34] Throughout the pre-war period, however, the pottery unions remained unflinching in their commitment to Free Trade (seemingly unmoved by their employer's arguments).[35]

From the outset of the 1906 contest, the Unionist candidate (and sitting member) for Hanley (A.H. Heath)[36] was at pains to stress how he objected to (what he called) 'the cursed bugbear of class' being introduced into this election. He told his audiences 'labour would be of little use without capital' and it was unfair for people to be 'scornful towards the capitalist'. He defended policy in South Africa declaring that 'the Chinese in the Transvaal were living as happily as the volunteers...it [was] a lie to call

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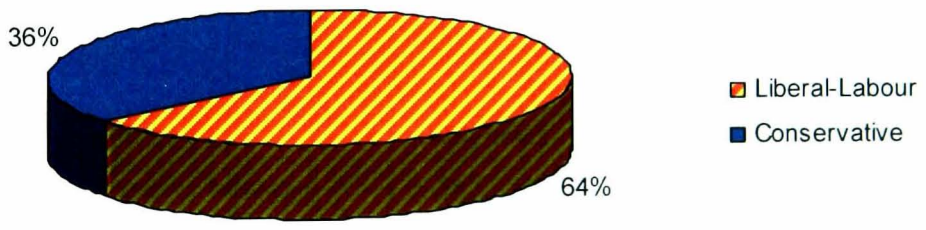
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Whipp notes, however, that the Staffordshire firms often went to extreme lengths to exaggerate the threat posed by foreign trade; even when Staffordshire exports were evidently expanding they claimed the industry was 'in peril'. Essentially, this was a ploy to use in aspects such as wage bargaining and demands for improvements in working conditions; see R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour*, p. 38.
[35] See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 20th January 1906.
[36] A. H. Heath was an Ironmaster and Colliery Proprietor and had unsuccessfully contested Hanley in 1892 and 1895. He won the seat in 1900; see *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament*, Volume 2, p. 165.

it slavery'.[37] Heath expressed his belief that the Education Act was 'a useful and wise measure' and that he regretted the actions of the nonconformist churches because he believed their grievance was less than they were claiming it to be. Heath very largely avoided the question of Tariff Reform. When questioned on the issue he declared himself 'distinctly a supporter of Balfour' and stated that he thought government ought to be given the 'fullest opportunity to negotiate with foreign countries for a better tariff system'.[38] He argued that he could not see 'why the doors of this country were open to others to make their markets but [they] closed their doors to us…binding the colonies together in commercial union was worthy of consideration [because] industries were crippled by the unfair competition to which they were exposed'.[39] So, in effect, despite attempting to avoid the issue Heath still managed unwittingly to present himself as a Tariff Reformer (especially since *any* utterances on the subject were inevitably widely discussed within the Liberal press). In relation to Ireland and Temperance the only thing he would say was that he believed the late administration had passed 'good and useful measures' and, when questioned, declared himself in favour of a 'modified' franchise reform for women 'who did not have a man to represent them'.[40]

The 1906 General Election in Stoke-on-Trent: Results and Analysis

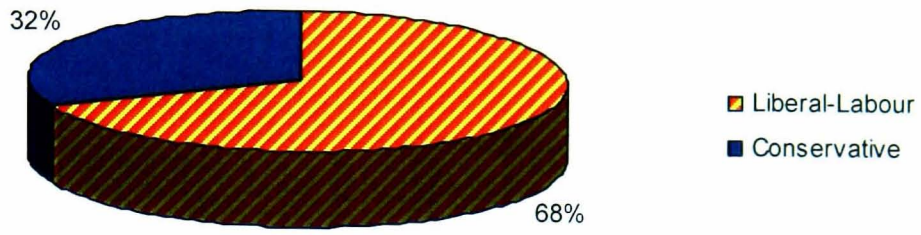
Fig. 1 Stoke (Turnout 84.8%)



15.1% swing Conservative to Liberal-Labour

[37] See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 2nd January 1906.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

Fig. 2 Hanley (Turnout 83.4%)



20.8% swing Conservative to Liberal-Labour

The 1906 general election in Stoke-on-Trent dramatically overturned the Unionist majorities of 1900 in both the Stoke and Hanley divisions.[41] In Stoke (see fig. 1) John Ward was returned with a majority of 3,372 (28.2% of the vote) and in Hanley, Edwards was returned with a very large majority of 4,896 (36.4%). Both results set new records for the respective constituencies. More importantly, they demonstrated that the Liberal-Labour Progressive Alliance could produce astonishing results. For the foreseeable future, at least, the election helped to secure Liberal and Labour allegiance to the politics of progressive co-operation in the area. The immediate post-1906 period in Stoke-on-Trent was one of renewed energy and optimism amongst both local Liberal and Labour forces. For the Liberals, the 1906 general election had demonstrated that electoral accommodation with Labour could work extremely effectively. This was reinforced the following year with the election of a Liberal-Labour candidate, Albert Stanley, at the North-West Staffordshire by-election.[42]

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[41] The 1900 general election had never been an accurate representation of party strength given that there had only been one issue, the Boer War and the Liberals had been defeated massively on that.

[42] The by-election in North-West Staffordshire in July 1907 saw the Liberal-Labour candidate, Albert Stanley, returned with 59.4% of the vote (a majority of 18.8%)). Like the general election, the by-election demonstrated the usefulness of co-operation in a constituency where the miners formed a significant proportion of the electorate.

3.3: The 1910 General Elections in Stoke-on-Trent

January 1910

Edwards and Ward stood again as Liberal-Labour candidates in the general election of January 1910. Because of the affiliation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain to the Labour Party Edwards was now expected (and required) to contest Hanley as an official (and straightforward) Labour candidate. This changed the political situation from 1906 and some of the Hanley Liberals became increasingly concerned as to their own position. In October 1909, for example, a section of the local Liberal Association expressed concern about Edwards's candidature in light of the new circumstances.[43] This did not amount to anything however; given Edwards's considerable personal popularity and local political support it was unlikely any opposition was likely to succeed.[44] Tellingly, it was only after Edwards had secured local Liberal support that the local Trades and Labour Council consented to giving him their backing.[45]

In Stoke, John Ward encountered more pronounced opposition to his nomination yet not from the Liberals but from the local Labour Party. This connected primarily to the fact that Ward had refused to sign the Labour Party constitution.[46] But like Edwards, Ward by that time had established a degree of popularity in the constituency which in a way ensured that any formal opposition to him was likely to encounter difficulties. So, as four years earlier, at the beginning of 1910 the impression was one of 'progressive' harmony in both Stoke and Hanley. Behind the scenes, however, there had been some noticeable disquiet about both candidates amongst certain local Liberals and Labour activists.[47]

The Unionists adopted two candidates new to the area. These were George Rittner in Hanley and David Kyd in Stoke. Both were London barristers and from the beginning of the campaign both determined that Tariff Reform, with particular reference to its

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[43] See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 30th October 1909.
[44] Ibid.
[45] *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 20th November 1909.
[46] Edwards had also initially declined to sign the Labour constitution though his refusal generated less debate; for local Labour opposition to Ward, see *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 8th January 1910.
[47] The issue of Ward's commitment to the Labour Party remained a controversial subject even as the campaign progressed; at one meeting, for example, he was asked by a member of the audience whether he would sign the party 'ticket in order to be under the control of the Labour Party branch as Edwards and Stanley had done' to which he replied 'I will not...if I go to represent this constituency I will be bound by no one but the electors who sent me'; see *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 15th January 1910.

benefits for the pottery industry, would constitute the major thrust of their platforms.[48] The recent budget also provided the Unionists with another critical line of attack. In contrast to previous contests the January 1910 general election saw the Unionists fighting noticeably aggressive campaigns. Their justification for this approach rested on an assumption that they were defending the state against what they deemed the road towards Socialism. Crucially, however, the leading pottery unions remained fundamentally opposed to any measure of Tariff Reform.[49] It could be suggested, therefore, that Unionist organisers had taken something of a gamble in adopting this strategy.

As across the country Liberal-Labour candidates had determined to focus more or less exclusively on the constitutional question. Ward related his objection to the Lords' actions on the basic premise that 'parliament had to provide for social responsibilities' most particularly pensions and he insisted the present government had determined that 'the veterans of industry who had assisted to procure the wealth of the community should no longer have only the paupers' dole and the workhouse to look forward to in their declining years'.[50] For Ward, the people had to decide whether the finances of the country should be 'levied, controlled and expended by their representatives [or by those who] stood for their own interests, power, privilege and nothing else.'[51] He went further in arguing that in a 'democratically elected country... the industrial community [had] no place for idle Lordlings in it anyway'.[52] Edwards, like Ward, focused primarily on the Lords also. He told voters that the second chamber was 'out of harmony with the general tenor and tone of things as they now existed'[53] and he elaborated in outlining how the 'great principle driving the budget of Lloyd George was that taxes should be put on those who had money and plenty of it and given to people who had very little'.[54] He also gave considerable attention to the land question declaring that 'at last they had found a man brave enough to tackle this question'.[55] He was referring to Lloyd George

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[48] *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 8th January 1910.
[49] *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 15th January 1910.
[50] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3rd January 1910.
[51] Ibid.
[52] *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 8th January, 1910.
[53] For Edwards on the constitutional question see *Staffordshire Sentinel,* 17th January 1910
[54] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6th January 1910.
[55] Edwards was evidently a great admirer of Lloyd George and he spoke about him regularly in his speeches suggesting that he very much remained a Liberal at heart. In contrast, Ward never mentioned him (or any other Liberals) at all.

of course. Throughout the campaign Edwards received considerable support from a number of Hanley's prominent Liberals and yet tellingly no significant Labour Party speakers came to support him. Elaborating upon their endorsement of Edwards, eminent local Liberals such as Sydney Malkin and Dr. Rowley-Moody cited his background as the prime reason voters ought to support him. As Rowley-Moody said 'there was a great deal of social legislation to be passed [and the country] needed men like Edwards with his knowledge of the workers in parliament'.[56] Adopting a 'Liberal' platform, alongside the Lords and the Land question, Edwards also focused considerable attention to the fiscal question arguing that Tariff Reform would inevitably mean taxing the food of the people (as he had done in 1906). He also spoke at length about unemployment, labour exchanges and the necessity for a scheme of national insurance.

The Unionist candidate in Hanley, George Rittner, declared himself a strong supporter of Tariff Reform (more so than the party's candidate had done in 1906) and like many Unionist candidates throughout the period endured a difficult campaign.[57] Rittner attempted to counter the suggestion that Tariff Reform would lead to increased food prices by claiming such measures would 'do away with every single tax on food supplies which come from the colonies...which are large enough to supply everything we need'.[58] He went on to suggest that it was 'better to be dependent upon these than upon the whim and caprice of either one or a combination of foreign powers'.[59] Throughout the contest he referred to the Labour Party as 'absolutely socialistic' and he took an equally aggressive attitude towards contemporary Liberalism, declaring, for example, that 'by being a Liberal today a man has to be a Home Ruler, Free Trader, a Socialist and opposed to religious education in schools'.[60] He asked one audience whether any 'thinking man could be in favour of a Godless education and revolutionary Socialism'.[61] It is interesting that as early as this, some Unionist candidates in the area were already beginning to articulate such ferocious anti-Labour sentiments (indeed, as well as anti-Liberal since they classed them as being one and the same thing). In the

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[56] Ibid.
[57] Many of his meetings were noticeable for an identifiable element of dissent i.e. booing and disruptions.
[58] See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 8th January 1910.
[59] Ibid.
[60] See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 1st January 1910.
[61] Ibid.

context of 1910, however, Enoch Edwards probably did not appear to be much of a 'revolutionary socialist' and it was highly unlikely the 'Socialist bogey' would have much of an impact in an area where the former miners' leader had achieved near cult-like status.

In Stoke, the Unionist candidate, David Kyd, was another strong advocate of Tariff Reform. He argued such a change would 'protect the home market, secure the colonial market and so benefit the working classes'.[62] Besides Tariff Reform, Kyd also focused significant attention to question of the navy, claiming only a Unionist government would ensure Britain's naval supremacy.[63] Both Unionist candidates argued the pottery trade would benefit from a system of tariff protection; the basic contention being that markets were getting smaller, trade in the district was declining and inevitably unemployment would increase.[64] The candidates pointed to Joseph Chamberlain's assertion (which he had issued in a statement on Tariff Reform) that all the 'different branches of the pottery trade would succeed by the adoption of a new policy'.[65] The determination of the Unionists to recapture seats in the district was evidenced by Balfour's appearance at the Victoria Hall to a capacity audience of over 4,000. Balfour in fact began his campaign in Hanley and his speech represented the first ever delivered by a leader of the Conservative Party in the area. It was reported that over 18,000 people had applied for tickets and that the audience was predominantly working-class. Balfour's visit had primarily been organised by the North Staffordshire Unionist Workingmen's Federation.[66] Balfour stated that 'never before [had] the ideals of the two great parties [been] so fundamentally diverged'. He articulated the view that Britain had to be prepared for war but the major issue of the present was 'Tariff Reform or Socialism'.[67] The Unionists appeared dismayed at the position taken by the Pottery Union officials; Rittner, for example, declared himself completely perplexed since he assumed 'every trade unionist, if he is consistent, ought to be a Tariff Reformer [because] the very object of trade unionism is to protect your labour and it is perfectly

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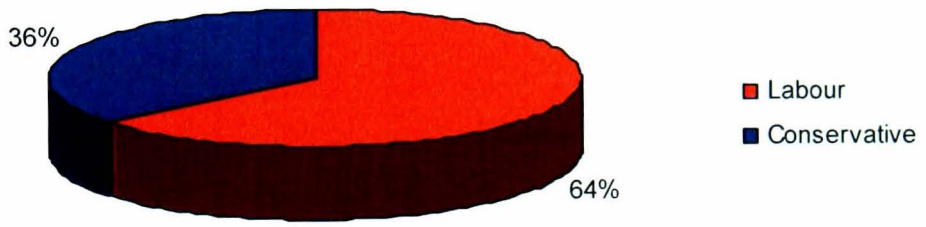
[62] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6th January 1910.
[63] He outlined a long list of facts about how the navy had been neglected under the Liberal administration, see ibid.
[64] See Rittner's figures on the declining exports of pottery, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 8th January 1910
[65] *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 15th January 1910.
[66] This organisation was reported to have a membership of over 5,000, see *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 8th January 1910.
[67] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6th January 1910 and *Staffordshire Advertiser* 8th January 1910.

useless to protect your labour if you do not protect the outcome of your labour'.[68] Ultimately, as analysis of the election campaigns in Stoke-on-Trent illustrates, it appears that workers in the pottery industry mistrusted the policy of Tariff Reform so this issue in particular may not have helped the Conservatives in the area in the way either candidates or the party managers perhaps anticipated.

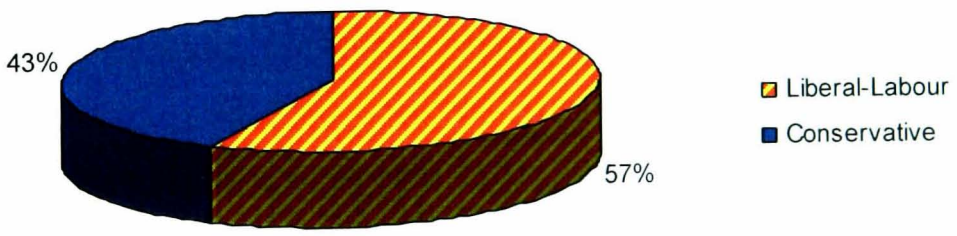
The January 1910 General Election: Results and Analysis

Fig. 3 Hanley (Turnout 87.1%)



4.3% swing from Liberal-Labour to Conservative

Fig. 4 Stoke (Turnout 88.8%)



6.7% swing Liberal-Labour to Conservative

[68] *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 15th January 1910.

The January 1910 general election results in Stoke and Hanley were viewed as a vindication of the legitimacy of recent Government legislation by both the Liberals and Labour. Enoch Edwards was returned in Hanley with a majority of 27.8% of the vote (see fig. 3).[69] This had dropped by 8.6% therefore on the last election.[70] In Stoke, John Ward won with a majority of 14.8% of the vote (see fig. 4) representing a decrease of 13.4%.[71] The results represented a major disappointment for the advocates of Protectionism, confirming that the Tariff Reform movement had not gained ground in this part of the county and while the Liberal-Labour vote had declined in both constituencies, it had done so only marginally. In Hanley, the miners support for their leader would have undoubtedly contributed to sustaining the Labour vote. As the *Staffordshire Advertiser* observed, Enoch Edwards wielded an 'influence which [was] hardly surpassed in [any other] mining constituency".[72] It is essential to recognise the critical role of individuals in the politics of this period and, arguably, historians have often overlooked this aspect,[73] but we ought to remember that the miners only constituted about 20% of the voting strength of the constituency at most, therefore, this factor alone does not suffice in explaining political loyalty in these sorts of areas. Whilst individual politicians undoubtedly could have a significant impact on the electoral history of a constituency, context remained significant. Both Edwards and Ward had polled exceedingly well in 1906 because (like Liberal and Labour candidates across the whole country) issues had given them a considerable advantage. Their defeat had been virtually unimaginable. Furthermore, as has been seen, they had been elected essentially on a Liberal platform. By 1910, the political context and the impact of the issues which had played such a critical role in 1906 had started to change and their positions might begin to change accordingly. As it was, however, the results of the 1910 (January) general election in Stoke-on-Trent saw another great victory for the combined forces of Liberalism and Labour.

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[69] Election figures from F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1885-1918* (Dartmouth, 1989), p. 118 and p. 196.

[70] The turnout rate was 87.1% compared to 83.4% in 1906.

[71] The turnout rate was 88.8%. In 1906 it had been 84.8%.

[72] *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 22nd January 1910. The same newspaper also suggested that a significant reason the miners voted in such large numbers for Edwards was because 'as a class they did not suffer from foreign competition to their industry'.

[73] McKibbin, for example, pays limited attention to the role of individuals in Labour's early development. This is understandable given that his is more of an organisational history of the Labour Party's development; nonetheless, the importance of individuals was paramount and in many cases determined the political fortunes of the movement in this early period.

For Labour as an *independent* organisation the January 1910 General Election did little to improve its position in the North Staffordshire Potteries. Whilst Stoke and Hanley were technically represented by Labour members, as we can see, in reality both Ward and Edwards remained loyal to their Liberal roots and (practically) both had been elected on a Liberal platform with Liberal support. So long as Labour representation continued in the way that it did (dominated by trade union sponsored members who remained politically as well as culturally Liberal), areas such as Stoke-on-Trent were likely to remain unfruitful ground for a potential independent Labour advance. As has been highlighted, within these localities the Labour candidates relied heavily upon Liberal organisation, finance and (critically) popular support. This was underpinned by a cult of local personality and (significantly) religious identification. Furthermore, as Labour Party organisation remained weak in the area, it seems unlikely that effective alternatives to Lib-Labism could emerge in the immediate future. Labour's development as a truly independent force would remain fragmented to say the least. Whilst the Labour Party may have offered a class-based appeal, in many ways so did the Liberals; this was based on a radical policy programme heightened by class-based rhetoric hostile to aristocratic wealth and privilege and, as we can see, this *Liberal* approach appeared to have a pronounced resonance in areas such as industrial North Staffordshire.

December 1910 General Election

Throughout 1910 John Ward continued to encounter opposition to his candidature from amongst the local Labour membership. In response to this, in May 1910 he took the unusual step of establishing his own constituency organisation. Supported by local labour organisations and the Liberals he aimed to counter official Labour opposition to him. He also suggested this was an attempt to counter the 'menace of Socialism'.[74] During the December general election in 1910 Ward once again focused his campaign on what he determined to be the 'irresponsible' behaviour of the House of Lords who he declared 'represented only their land, their class and the monopolies of the few...the only question [was] who should rule; the peers or the people?'[75] Again, offering a more comprehensive programme than Edwards, Ward discussed pensions, insurance, housing, land taxation, nationalisation, popular control of education and the right to

[74] See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 14th May 1910.

work.[76] Edwards on the other hand concentrated on the Osborne judgement, the Lords, Free Trade, Home Rule and electoral reform.[77] It is important to recognise how Edwards clearly perceived himself to be a trade union representative first, followed by party connections; he always sought to express how he was selected unanimously by all of the progressive forces in the parliamentary borough; trade unions, the Labour Party and the Liberals. As a representative of one of the largest unions in the country, inevitably, Edwards argued strongly that unions should be allowed to use their funds as they thought best. He argued that the Osborne decision would seriously impair labour representation in parliament and thus make it harder for the wishes of working men to be carried out. Edwards concluded that, as trade unionists, this represented the most important question ever before them.[78] Wrigley suggests that while the Osborne judgement did not have such a significant impact in terms of the 1910 general election, it did have a major effect on Labour politics in the sense that, like Taff Vale, it served to encourage trade unions to look more concertedly towards the Labour Party.[79]

The Unionist candidate in Hanley (as in the earlier contest) was Rittner. In Stoke Samuel Joyce-Thomas replaced Kyd who had retired owing to business commitments. Like Rittner, Joyce-Thomas was a strong Tariff Reformer. Both Unionists attempted to divert attention to the fiscal question despite the Liberals' efforts to keep it focused on the constitutional issue. Where the Unionists did discuss the constitutional question their campaign rested upon a basic assertion that politics at present effectively amounted to party dictatorship and that a strong upper house was imperative to 'safeguard the will of the people'.[80] A joint election address issued on behalf of all the Unionist candidates in North Staffordshire urged 'the moderate man' to 'believe in the voice of the people more than a particular party.'[81] The address outlined how the Unionists were determined to reform the House of Lords and increase democratic

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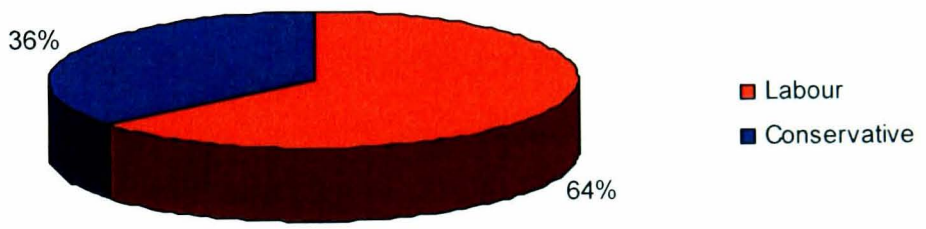
[75] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2nd December 1910.
[76] See Ward election advertisement in ibid.
[77] See Edwards's election address, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2nd December 1910; note that this address was published jointly with those of Ward, Wedgwood, Stanley and Pearce presumably in an effort to cut election costs.
[78] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 29th November 1910.
[79] See C. Wrigley, 'Labour and the Trade Unions' in K. D. Brown, *The First Labour Party*, p. 147.
[80] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2nd December 1910
[81] Ibid.

participation by submitting important matters to public referendum[82]. They reiterated a fundamental opposition to Irish Home Rule and how their party were pledged to fight for the supremacy of the British navy and to extend the provisions of the Workmen's Compensation Act and, of course, the central plank of the Unionist programme, as we have seen, remained the commitment to Tariff Reform which (they contended) would give the people better food, housing, clothing and transfer tax to goods manufactured abroad and dumped into England to the detriment of the British worker'.[83]

The December 1910 General Election: Results and Analysis

Fig. 5 Hanley (Turnout 78.6%)

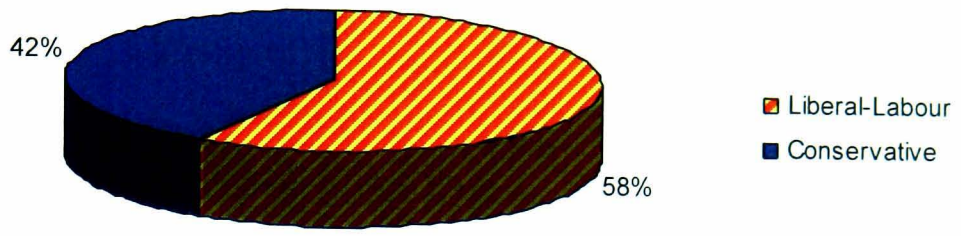


0.3% swing Conservative to Labour

[82] They argued this meant the public would be consulted on single issues which were of considerable importance. In portraying themselves as ultra-democratic it was hoped this would contrast greatly to the 'sectional' interests of the Liberals and Labour.

[83] See joint Unionist election address, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2nd December 1910.

Fig. 6 Stoke (Turnout 80.3%)



0.8% swing Conservative to Liberal-Labour

The results of the December 1910 general election saw Enoch Edwards returned with a majority of 28.4% of the vote (see fig. 5) which represented an increase of 0.6% on the January election. This suggests that Edwards's electoral support was remarkably solid. In Stoke, John Ward was returned again with a majority of 16.4% of the vote (see fig. 6) representing an increase of 1.6% on the last election. Like Edwards this suggests that Ward's core vote was strong. No doubt the Unionists' failure to divert attention away from the constitutional question and to Tariff Reform had played a critical role in their defeat in both elections. In December, as analysis of the campaigns illustrate, the Unionist candidates appeared more aggressive but were still unable to influence electors' allegiances. For Labour, the period after 1906 and up to 1911 did little to change the basic position of the movement in the area. Whilst technically both seats were now represented by Labour Party members, close scrutiny of Ward's and Edwards speeches in all three general election campaigns suggests that neither perceived themselves to be primarily representatives of that organisation. They saw themselves as 'Labour' members but not Labour Party members. In their mind, the two things were very different. Ultimately, even by 1911, Labour politics in the area remained dominated by trade unionists with pronounced Liberal sympathies. Only a dramatic upheaval of some kind was likely to change this.

3.4: The 1912 Hanley By-Election

Political Context

The 1910 general elections had suggested a degree of stability in the 'progressive' vote and the potential durability of the Progressive Alliance in Stoke-on-Trent. Whilst relations between the Liberal and Labour organisations might have been in a sense lukewarm on occasions (as illustrated above) the outward image, at least, was one of progressive unity. The area remained one where traditions of co-operation between Liberalism and organised labour appeared to be particularly strong. After 1910 this changed dramatically. Some sections of the local Labour movement began to express concern that Edwards was not effectively providing a distinct enough Labour position. Furthermore, North Staffordshire had been pinpointed by Labour Party headquarters as being in need of dramatic improvement and reorganisation. [84] The Executive Committee of the Labour Party made attempts to encourage the local Labour movement to establish a more sophisticated organisation: the first step of which would be in connection with canvassing work. The central party recognised the difficulties its local organisations faced in places like Hanley which were represented by miners' MPs.[85] It was appreciated that in these sorts of constituencies little enthusiasm could be raised for the development of independent Labour organisation; either from the representatives themselves, the local Trades Council or activists. Although the Labour Party clearly recognised seats such as these were in need of urgent attention, the extent to which the national party could change these circumstances remained limited. Neither did it seem that change was likely to emerge from the local labour movement itself firstly because of the influence of the miners and secondly because the potters also remained conservative in their approach to independent labour politics.

After 1910 the Liberal-Labour relationship in the area began to fragment. Famously, this came to a head in July 1912 when Hanley's sitting member Enoch Edwards died and the seat thus became vacant. The ensuing debate as to which party had the greater claim to the seat made the Hanley by-election one of the most famous and controversial of the immediate pre-war period. It could be said that Hanley was perhaps one of the most significant by-elections in Britain before 1914. The by-election represented a

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[84] See *Labour Party Executive Committee Minutes*, 2nd July 1912.

[85] This view also emerges very strongly from Ramsay MacDonald; see *Labour Leader*, 18th July 1912.

critical test of the Progressive Alliance in an area where the Liberal-Labour alliance had appeared to have offered so much potential as an electoral strategy and approach to politics. The importance of this election was not simply local. Petter suggests that the Hanley by-election threatened to damage the workings of the national Lib-Lab pact in a way no other election had ever done.[86] The by-election generated significant national interest on the basis that it seemed to demonstrate an increasingly fraught relationship between the 'progressive' parties.

As we have seen, Edwards's exact political identity remained ambiguous up to his death in July 1912 although he clearly remained more of a Liberal than a straight Labour man despite his background as the leader of one of the country's great unions.[87] By the time of his death, Edwards had become a tremendously prominent and popular political figure in the North Staffordshire Potteries. In some ways his party affiliation may have been bedside the point. By 1912, many of Hanley's electors might have concluded that party was not in actual fact a prime consideration. Or, rather, they continued to perceive him as simply a Liberal- trade unionist whatever the official tag now attached to him.

In light of Edwards's personal politics and the fact that he had always been elected with substantial Liberal assistance the Liberals considered Hanley to be a Liberal seat. It was perhaps inevitable that the debate which ensued over the adoption of candidates was protracted to say the least. Historians have often considered events surrounding the Hanley by-election as a critical turning point in the politics of British Labour.[88] The experience clearly demonstrated to Labour that in some localities the party had become unhealthily reliant upon the Liberals. Equally worrying, in these sorts of areas it appeared virtually impossible to find suitable candidates from the local movement; i.e.

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[86] M. Petter, 'Progressive Alliance', p. 52.

[87] Gregory suggests that Edwards and Stanley were in fact 'bitterly hostile' towards the Labour Party even in the years following affiliation, see R Gregory, *The Miners in British Politics*, p. 170. McKibbin, however, suggests that Edwards was, in fact, not as committed to the Liberals as is often imagined especially when compared to some of his colleagues. McKibbin suggests that as president of the Miners Federation he had handled relations with the Labour Party with exceptional goodwill; see R. McKibbin *Evolution*, p. 54. Indeed, it ought to be stressed that Edwards had become increasingly critical of the Liberal administration most particularly on the issue of unemployment; a matter he believed the government had not addressed sufficiently, see *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 30th October 1910. I would suggest that analysis of Edwards's 1910 general election campaigns demonstrates his increasing radicalism.

[88] See M. Petter, 'Progressive Alliance'; R. McKibbin, *Evolution* and H. Pelling, *Social Geography*.

ones equipped and inclined to promote a distinctive and independent enough *Labour* appeal. Furthermore, the political culture of these areas was such that voters simply did not possess a clear concept of the difference between the Liberal and Labour parties; to all intents and purposes they were one and the same thing. 'Progressivism' meant anything that was not the Tories. Contemporary issues (and the party attitudes on these) further heightened perceptions that Labour and the Liberals represented essentially one and the same interest. The Labour Party consequently faced considerable difficulties in this sort of environment. The realisation of the realities of the Progressive Alliance could in itself prove a defining moment in Labour's development. It alerted the party to the problematic nature of electoral entaglements with the Liberals. This served to encourage a more assertive policy of independence. This might not have immediate effect but it could serve the organisation well in the future. But even in an immediate sense a Liberal-Labour split could have dramatic effects on the political situation in many other parts of the country (especially areas where Liberal-Labour agreements existed). Whilst undoubtedly Labour's prospects remained poor when challenging both Liberals and Unionists, Labour intervention, however, could cause tremendous problems for the Liberals.[89]

The situation was clear for the Hanley Liberals; Edwards had been elected with Liberal organisation and (they assumed) Liberal support, although funds had primarily been provided by the Miners' Federation.[90] The Liberals drew Labour's attention to the arrangement made (and put into effect) six years earlier which had seen the Liberals supporting Labour candidates in Hanley and Stoke in return for Labour support of Liberal candidates in Leek and Newcastle. It was inevitable perhaps that the Liberals took the first steps towards adopting a candidate. On 28th June the Hanley Liberal Six Hundred met to consider the nomination of a candidate. Their first choice was the President of the local Liberal Council, Dr. Rowley-Moody who accepted that his name

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[89] This is reflected by the fact that after 1911 by-elections involving the Labour Party were responsible for the greater proportion of losses for the Liberals than they been previously. The period 1906-1910 had seen 17% of all seats lost having involved Labour candidates whereas after 1911 this increased to 36%, see M. Petter, 'Progressive Alliance', p. 51.

[90] The Midlands Miners Federation continued to contribute £200 per year to the Liberals for the upkeep of the Hanley constituency right up to the time of the by-election, see R. Gregory, *The Miners and British Politics*, p. 171.

be put forward as a prospective candidate (albeit apparently reluctantly).[91] In conjunction with this, the local Liberal and Labour Association were summoned to meet three days later in order to formally adopt Moody.[92] In the intervening time, however, Rowley- Moody ruled himself out, claiming that he was too upset about the death of his close friend (Enoch Edwards) to continue with his candidature.[93] This left the Liberals with no obvious candidate to contest the seat.[94] Whilst a number of people locally had intimated they would be prepared to stand, the Hanley Liberal Association made it clear that they only wanted 'an out and out radical.... someone who would unite the two sections of the progressive forces'.[95] This suggests the Hanley Liberals had concluded that only a radical could appeal to both Labour and Liberal supporters. Conveniently for the Hanley Liberals the national headquarters had already taken the matter in hand and had arranged for Robert Outhwaite (a young radical land reformer) to go to Hanley with a view to addressing a meeting of the Hanley Liberal and Labour forces on 1st July.[96] The essential context of that meeting, of course, was that the assembled group were convening (in their understanding) to adopt Dr. Rowley-Moody, so it must have come as something of a shock to be met with a new candidate. Outhwaithe was widely reported to have delivered a highly impressive speech and appeared to be on the verge of adoption when one of the Labour representatives (Joseph Lovatt, secretary of the Potters' Union), asked that in the light of the changed circumstances the meeting be adjourned for two days to allow the Labour representatives to consider the situation.[97] The local Labour organisation was meeting

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[91] The following account is taken from a detailed report after the by-election by the secretary of the Midland Liberal Federation; see *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 31st July 1912.

[92] This organisation consisted of about 400 Liberals and 200 Labour representatives.

[93] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, July 5th, 1912.

[94] Although there was some discussion of the possibility of Sydney Malkin, the former Lord Mayor of Burslem, who had considerable local influence as a possible Liberal candidate; see *Staffordshire Advertiser*, July 29th, 1912.

[95] *Staffordshire Advertiser*, July 6th, 1912. It seems that the Hanley Liberals did attempt to secure a local candidate and only after that had proved unfruitful negotiated with the party headquarters. The suggestion that Outhwaite was imposed upon the local Association appears without foundation.

[96] Robert Outhwaite had previously contested seats in Birmingham and Sussex. His major interest was land reform and it has been suggested that at that time he was on the verge of joining the Labour Party, see R. McKibbin, *Evolution,* p. 55.

[97] Joseph Lovatt had been a member of the Hanley LRC since its formation in July 1906. His union, however, had only recently affiliated to the national Labour Party (1912). It is important to note that the Labour movement in North Staffordshire continued to remain fragmented right up to 1914 (it was only during that year for instance that the all the local Labour organisations changed their name to the North Staffordshire Labour Party; see R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour*, p. 188. It is critical to remember, however, that it was a potter's official who requested time for Labour to consider its position i.e. not the miners. This fact seems to get overlooked in assessment of the Hanley by-election.

the following evening so it was also suggested by the chairman that Outhwaite be invited to address the Labour group in order for them to 'have the opportunity of considering whether he would be a suitable candidate from their point of view'. Rowley-Moody responded that 'one day would be cheap' if it meant they could achieve unity and at the same time the Labour representatives intimated they would do all they could to ensure Outhwaite be enabled to address their meeting [98] It would appear from this context that both the Hanley Liberals and Labour remained anxious the by-election be contested as a united 'progressive' force. Such optimism proved to be short-lived however. The following morning news from the Labour headquarters was received stating that Outhwaite would not be welcome to address that evening's meeting in Hanley and that he would not be supported as a candidate. Ultimately, the Labour Party's position was that it would oppose any candidate who was not willing to accept the Labour whip in Parliament and so would instruct the North Staffordshire Miners Federation to find a candidate of their own if the Liberals refused to withdraw Outhwaite.[99] Thus developed an acute crisis between the Liberal and Labour parties and the prospect of a three cornered contest in Hanley. The situation was further exacerbated a few days later when Labour's national executive issued a statement stating that it 'regarded Hanley as a Labour seat [and] in the event of a three cornered fight would withdraw its members from the House of Commons during the election [so] that the full force of the party may be behind the candidate'.[100] Ramsay MacDonald articulated his party's position clearly when he claimed that 'the Liberals are the aggressors [and] if they will not allow us to retain our present number in Parliament we must act accordingly.' [101] Labour's candidate would be selected by the North Staffordshire Miners' Federation. [102] Two days later the NSMF adopted their President since 1888, Samuel Finney, as Labour candidate. Like Enoch Edwards, Finney's political outlook was overwhelmingly Liberal, underpinned by the fact that he was also

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[98] *Staffordshire Advertiser*, July 6th, 1912.

[99] Outhwaite was officially adopted by the Hanley Liberal Association at 10 O'clock that evening (2nd July).

[100] *The Times*, 3rd July 1912. The following day (4th July) Arthur Henderson announced that the Labour Party would contest Crewe. Since this was a seat where Labour had an extremely poor record such action could only be perceived by the Liberal Party as deliberately vindictive (an act of retaliation over Hanley). As it turned out Crewe proved to be disastrous for the Liberals. The party lost the seat by just 6.9% of the vote. Labour intervention undoubtedly cost the Liberals the seat (which the party had won in 8 out of the 9 previous general elections since 1885).

[101] *Staffordshire Advertiser*, July 6th, 1912.

[102] This was because the miners union paid for the candidate.

a staunch Primitive Methodist. It was generally believed that Finney would gain the support of the Labour section of the Liberal-Labour Six Hundred and from a wide section of the local community but he was possibly not the sort of candidate Labour headquarters may have had in mind.

Finney had been a close associate and friend of Edwards and it was assumed he would benefit from this association. But the Liberal Party remained adamant that Hanley was by right a Liberal seat and continued to refuse to withdraw Outhwaite, arguing that Edwards had sat as a Liberal until 1909 and had been returned on the basis of Liberal organisation. Furthermore, as the Liberal Chief Whip commented 'Hanley had always been regarded as a Liberal seat and so would be fought against all comers'.[103] Clearly, there existed a strong determination amongst Liberals locally and nationally that Hanley should be fought at all costs; especially since (as they perceived it) present causes were just too great 'to allow a mere caucus to dominate the choice of a great constituency'.[104] The Liberals might have felt encouraged also by the fact that a number of prominent local Labour activists even appeared to support the assertion that the seat should be fought by a Liberal candidate with Labour acquiescence on the premise that 'the great cause of progress had always been dear to Edwards's heart [and that] must go forward'.[105] Much has been written about the Hanley by-election although most accounts have offered inadequate conclusions in relation to how the crisis actually unfolded. It appears quite straightforward however; the national Labour Party determined they did not wish to support Outhwaite as a Liberal-Labour candidate and so decided to pursue an independent challenge.

The Hanley Liberals were clearly enormously pleased that they had secured a man with 'a great policy that he had made his own'.[106] As one Liberal member asserted, the Hanley Liberals had not wanted 'some Whig in the division but a man with tried service and brilliant abilities' and it was generally believed that Outhwaite was at that time 'the

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[103] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, July 3rd, 1912.
[104] See Hemmerde at Outhwaite's adoption meeting, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4th July 1912.
[105] See opening meeting of the Liberal campaign at the Victoria Hall at which a number of Labour members were present. Joseph Lovatt and Miles Harper- Parker went so far as to state publicly that they thought it 'a great pity the Labour Party had been unable to accept Outhwaite's candidature'. Both had been present at the speech delivered by Outhwaite a few days earlier and were reported to have been enormously impressed, see *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4th July 1912.
[106] See Grimwade at Outhwaite's adoption meeting, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4th July 1912.

ablest politician outside parliament'.[107] Equally important, Outhwaite had an admirable record in fighting for trade unionism. He had played a critical role in developing trade unionism amongst the miners in South Africa.[108] Altogether, as one Liberal expressed, it seemed that he had come before them 'at the very time they needed someone like him'.[109] Outhwaite came to Hanley with the support of the highest echelons of the Liberal Party. Tanner suggests Lloyd George himself had determined the land reformers should challenge a number of by-elections during the summer of 1912 in an attempt to demonstrate the 'electoral popularity' of land reform and attempt to recover some of the ground lost over the Insurance Act.[110]

The 1912 Hanley By-Election Campaign

Outhwaite had intimated to the Hanley Liberals that he wished to conduct his campaign exclusively on the one issue of land reform and this he did.[111]Informing the Hanley electors that he intended to 'strike a blow for the emancipation of the people from the land monopoly' Outhwaite contended that land reform would 'shake the whole system of privilege to the foundation' and he continued [what] 'rightfully belonged to the people; the Liberals were going to take back for the people'[112] It is important to remember that at this time the Liberal Party had not yet formulated a definite policy on the land issue and it remained a question of continuing investigation. Outhwaite, however, had already conducted two previous campaigns on the issue and was well versed in presenting the case for land reform. In Hanley, Outhwaite argued that at present the enormous revenue received in ground rents contributed nothing to the local rates. If the law changed to ensure a contribution through the taxation of land values, a district such as the Potteries would see significant changes. There would be an increase in trade because land would be used more productively. Ultimately, the suggestion was

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[107] See Hemmerde on Outhwaite, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4th July 1912.
[108] Ibid. This was an aspect which might have been significant in endearing him to many in the constituency and the local press went to great lengths in reiterating his background in this respect yet it is often overlooked in many assessments of the by-election. In many ways, therefore, he was even more of an ideal candidate for the locality; a Liberal with a good record of assisting trade unionism.
[109] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4th July 1912.
[110] See Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 66; Tanner suggests that a number of progressives and the Chief Whip were opposed to this.
[111] For detailed analysis of the land issue in British politics during this period see, I. Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land: The Land Issue and Party Politics, 1906-1914* (Royal Historical Society, Woodbridge, 2001).
[112] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6th July 1912.

that land reform would help alleviate unemployment.[113]

In contrast to Outhwaite's single issue campaign, the Unionist candidate, as in 1910, Rittner, addressed a wide variety of issues; Tariff Reform, Irish Home Rule, the House of Lords, the Insurance Bill, the franchise and the navy. Only to a very limited extent did he focus attention to proposed land reform and (inevitably) he also had another powerful line of attack in the topic of the current Liberal-Labour debacle. At his opening meeting Rittner contended that the immediate priority of the Unionists was to 'check a government that was rapidly ruining the country [and] carry out their own constructive policy of Tariff Reform'.[114] Unless there was an adoption of imperial preference there would never be any significant increase in the rates of wages for the working man. Furthermore, labour needed to protest strongly against aliens. He suggested the Liberal land policy was simply an attempt to 'catch votes' and avoided becoming too embroiled in the subject itself, other than contending that the Unionists' land policy would see government purchasing land from the landlords and then get unemployed people working on it. The basic idea was to make land more productive in order to make food cheaper (rather than importing so much). Effectively, this seemed to amount to land nationalisation.[115]

The Labour candidate, Samuel Finney, found it difficult to offer anything distinctive; his moderate and lacklustre campaign contrasted greatly with the apparent militancy of his platform speakers and even more so compared to the impassioned, intelligent and radical campaign of his Liberal opponent.[116] Finney appeared to be out of his depth and

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[113] This is a very brief summary of Outhwaite's major arguments in relation to land reform and the impact such would have on the local area. The subject was immensely complex and some of Outhwaite's speeches were enormously detailed. The essence of his argument throughout the campaign, however, remained that land reform provided a simple means to emancipate the people; it would attack the privileges of landlords (which was a class issue as much as anything else) and it would have significant social and economic benefits. For detailed coverage of Outhwaite's election speeches see subsequent press coverage in *Staffordshire Sentinel* and *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 6th July- 14th July 1912.

[114] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3rd July 1912.

[115] Outhwaite responded by saying this was simply impossible.

[116] Throughout the contest an array of Labour leaders came to the constituency in support of Finney including (to name just a few) Keir Hardie, George Lansbury, Ramsay MacDonald, John Hodge, John Sutton, Will Crooks, Stephen Walsh, Albert Stanley and J. R. Clynes. In reality, it was only these who actually discussed policy at all. Finney simply tended to focus on his party's greater claim to the seat and his own (equally great) claim as a Staffordshire man and a miner. It should be noted also that the visiting speakers offered a more distinctly socialistic approach. Arguably, this might not have sat comfortably with the moderate Liberal culture of the constituency although whether this made a difference to the overall result remains an open question.

paid too much attention (at the expense of discussion of actual issues) to accusing the Liberals of aggression and attempting to steal a Labour seat. Once the by-election campaign had begun that was simply beside the point. He did attempt to consider the land issue, which he contended was 'the most practicable policy at present'[117] although he was unable to elaborate on the subject in the same way as Outhwaite. It ought to be remembered perhaps that, fundamentally, Labour's appeal in areas such as Hanley was based principally upon practical issues and it was from such a perspective that men like as Finney approached politics. Detailed examination of questions such as land reform was simply not what they were about or what they could comfortably handle. Finney was widely perceived to have been a weak candidate. Indeed, whilst he certainly did appear to be out of his depth in many ways, this judgement was a little unkind. He simply did not approach politics in the same way as politicians such as Outhwaite.

In terms of Liberal organisation it appears to have been slow in getting started. Arthur Nicholson (Secretary of the Midland Liberal Federation) reported that when he first visited the division (at Outhwaite's request) he found 'things in great confusion' and so had had to take 'drastic steps'.[118] These steps included the deployment of a team of eleven experienced agents in the division, each of whom was allocated a specific function (meetings, literature, removals etc). As Nicholson reported 'for nine days a tremendous pressure was kept up... although the task was great since we had to make an organisation as we went along'. Nicholson concluded, however, the Liberal campaign 'completely beat the Labour Party'.[119]

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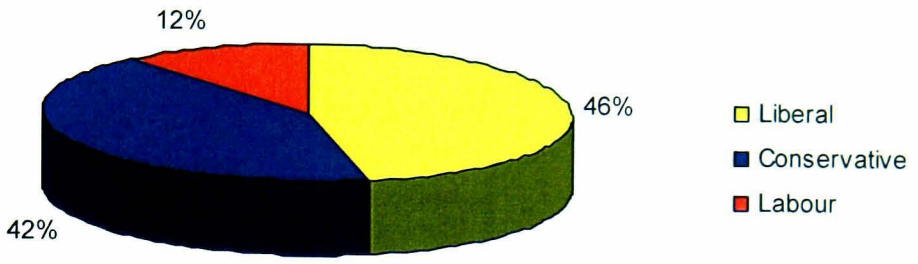
[117] He also stated that he would pursue the same policy in respect to mining royalties and, when questioned, stated that he was in favour of land nationalisation; see *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6th July 1912.
[118] *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 31st July 1912.
[119] *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 31st July 1912.

The 1912 Hanley By-Election: Analysis

Fig. 7 Hanley (Turnout 85.1%)



Seat uncontested by Liberals in 1910

The 1912 by-election saw the first ever three-way contest in the history of the parliamentary borough of Hanley. The result was widely perceived as likely to have a much wider impact on politics across the country. As things turned out, Outhwaite was returned but with a much narrower majority than Edwards had enjoyed. The turnout rate reflected the interest the by-election had generated; at 85% percent only one previous election had ever surpassed it.[120] Outhwaite won with a relatively small majority; 4.6% of the vote (see fig. 7). Edwards's majority in December 1910 had been 28.4%. For the Conservatives the result seemed to suggest that (like other recent by-elections), in Rittner's words, the Liberals 'weren't as strong as they thought they were'.[121] But the fact remained that the Liberal Party had still managed to win the seat despite determined opposition. Moreover, Outhwaite, and therefore the party, had staked all on the land question. Not all Liberals may have been entirely convinced this offered the best strategy; even at this time single issue campaigns were very rare. Outhwaite (and no doubt the Liberal leadership, especially Lloyd George) believed the Liberal Government had been given a mandate on land reform. Locally, it reaffirmed for the Liberals that Hanley was a Liberal seat. Outhwaite himself, however, asked that no animosity towards Labour be shown in spite of what had happened. Yet, given the evident bitterness felt by the Labour Party the chances of relations ever being the same again seemed remote. Liberal organisers were clearly much aware of this fact. Arthur

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[120] The turnout rate in December 1910 had been 78.6%. The by-election had therefore seen an increase of 6.5%.

[121] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 15th July 1912.

Nicholson declared that whilst it was a 'great thing to win Hanley and so strengthen the position of the Chief Whip in dealing with Labour it must be confessed that such struggles would be fraught with the utmost danger to progressive politics'.[122] Across the Liberal press there was also evident unease about the action the party had taken in Hanley. Some even blamed their own leadership whilst others simply called for restraint from the parties on both sides.[123]

Tanner suggests that the experience of Hanley did not necessarily mean the Liberal Party had abandoned the Progressive Alliance though it did reflect that the leadership (in particular Lloyd George) recognised that the Liberals had to 'stay ahead of the field' in order to keep the Labour Party in check. He comments that this was simply how the Progressive Alliance worked: by 'informal displays of strength rather than discussion and agreement'.[124] That this was the case is indisputable yet equally it has to be recognised that it created potential problems; as Hanley demonstrated, even if the Liberals managed to hold on to a seat under such circumstances their majority could become extremely precarious and equally, as Tanner himself recognises, another outcome was that it could push the Liberals into adopting even more radical policies and that could be very dangerous politically.[125]

For the Labour Party the result of the 1912 by-election was hugely disappointing, not just because the party had lost but, as the *Labour Leader* bemoaned, because it had lost 'so decisively'.[126] Labour had come third and had obtained just 1,694 votes (11.8% of the total) in contrast to the Liberals 6,647 (46.4%). This did not bode well for the prospects of independent Labour representation in the area. More immediately, given the national attention the election had received, neither was it likely to be helpful for Labour propaganda more generally. The Labour Party's bitterness over the by-election was clearly reflected by Ramsay MacDonald when he stated categorically that `Hanley [would be] the most expensive victory Liberalism has had within this generation` and he continued to state that 'Labour is not going to accept its present strength as its final

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[122] *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 31st July 1912.
[123] See *Liberal Magazine,* August 1912, for example, which appeared to blame the Liberal Party for creating the situation and Petter, *Progressive Alliance*, p. 53.
[124] D. Tanner, *Political Change*, pp. 66-67.
[125] Ibid, p. 67.
[126] *Labour Leader,* 18th July 1912.

strength ...the convenience of no party is going to deter us'.[127] Yet as the *Labour Leader* suggested the result could have been interpreted as a blessing in disguise because it revealed that 'Liberalism was the enemy of organised Labour.' Amongst the miners particularly, the *Labour Leader* believed it would 'mean the death-blow of Liberal-Labourism as a national force'.[128] *The Times* also viewed the contest as signalling a significant departure in politics (although from a slightly different perspective) when it reflected 'maybe in the growing intractability of the Labour Party we are witnessing the beginning of the end of the coalition'.[129] In his study of the miners and British politics, Gregory concludes that with the Hanley by-election 'Lib-Lab politics in the Midlands came to an end in a welter of bitter recrimination'.[130] For Labour, as much as the by-election highlighted the dangers of too close an association with the Liberals it also served to demonstrate the party's poor organisation in the area. No attempts had ever been made by the respective 'labour' organisations to organise a genuine Labour Party in the district (despite the insistence of the central organisation that such work ought to be undertaken as a matter of urgency).[131] The party had repeatedly urged the Staffordshire Miners' Federation to withdraw the financial assistance they gave to the local Liberal Associations.[132] Yet the Federation had repeatedly refused to change its position. The national party viewed this as a deliberate attempt to suppress independent Labour activity in the political arena in the region. Consequently, during the campaign the Labour candidate found hardly any effective organisation behind him and equally limited public support. Assessing the political situation after the by-election the Labour press concluded that where independent politics was not valued by the public and labour organisations, a week's campaign was understandably unlikely to win a majority of votes.[133] Many believed the choice of Labour candidate in itself was partially to blame for the poor vote. Finney was

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[127] Ramsay MacDonald quoted in McKibbin, *Evolution,* p. 62. During the campaign Ramsay MacDonald had been ferociously critical of the Liberals action; when he threatened to withdraw his members from parliament, for example, he declared that any Liberal efforts to prevent Labour's expansion was 'little short of a declaration of war', see *The Times*, 9th July 1912.

[128] *Labour Leader*, 18th July 1912.

[129] *The Times*, 17th July 1912.

[130] R. Gregory, *Miners and British Politics*, p. 172.

[131] Another reflection of the weakness of independent Labour politics in the area was that there was not a local branch of the ILP until 1912.

[132] Clearly, the Staffordshire Miners Federation had remained loyal to the Liberal Party and lukewarm on the question of independent labour representation. This had been reflected in 1909 when the district voted against affiliation to the Labour party and were subsequently forced to fall into line with the rest of the country; see *Labour Leader*, 18th July 1912.

widely perceived to have failed to present a class appeal distinct enough to differentiate himself from the Liberals. As the *Labour Leader* reported 'the sad truth has to be admitted [that] Outhwaite voiced the protest of the working classes against exploitation more insistently than the Labour candidate and [his speeches] breathed more of the spirit of revolt than the utterances of Finney.'[134] It was contended that responsibility for such a poor candidate lay ultimately with the local rank and file, who should have chosen someone who reflected the 'militant spirit which moves the factory, workshop and mine'[135] more effectively. Of course, the *Labour Leader* would have naturally taken this position, but even so, at this particular election Finney was undoubtedly a weak candidate and a stark contrast to the intellect and vigour of Outhwaite (arguably one of the country's most capable exponents of land reform). The *Staffordshire Sentinel* also acknowledged the choice of candidate had probably had a major effect on the result.[136] The newspaper contended that had Myles Harper-Parker or Robert Smillie been adopted they could have conducted more vigorous campaigns. This remains speculative though and even if the Labour Party had adopted a more energetic and dynamic candidate it remains an open question whether the result would have been dramatically different.

As has been seen, the established political culture in Hanley was such that demands for independent labour representation met with remarkably limited enthusiasm. This presented a significant obstacle for any immediate development of the Labour Party in similar seats.[137] To some extent, the experience of the 1912 by-election encouraged the miners to reassess their relationship with the Liberal Party. Just a few weeks after the by-election the Miners' Federation decided to 'cease financing a local Liberal-Labour alliance and take immediate steps to set up machinery for the formation of a Labour Association for political purposes'.[138] As opposed to simply feeling defeated by the

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[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid .
[136] The choice of Labour candidate had been left to the miners since it was that union which had paid most of Edwards's expenses.
[137] After the miners had transferred allegiance to the Labour Party in 1909 the national executive had been attempting to set up separate Labour organisations in all the mining constituencies. Hanley was probably not uncommon in respect to poor (independent) organisation.
[138] See R. Gregory, *Miners and British Politics*, p. 173. McKibbin suggests that changes within the leadership of the Miner's Federation also served to encourage greater enthusiasm for independent labour representation and a desire to 'put pressure on its affiliate unions'; see R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, p. 26.

experience, Gregory suggests the miners in their anger determined to fight again and do better.[139] Ultimately, the by-election prompted a significant change of attitude amongst the miners' leaders and this would have national significance.[140] It may be suggested that this had come a bit late in the day. Labour would continue to face difficulties in attempting to compete with a re-energised and radicalised Liberal Party which had proven it could attract significant support amongst the working classes. In areas such as Hanley, this was underpinned by deeply embedded attitudes towards trade unionism and its relationship with Liberalism. So although it may be the case that the union's leadership had become detached from official Liberalism (encourage by instances such as Hanley) we should not automatically presume that the wider membership itself switched allegiance from the Liberals at the same time and at the same rate.

An essential factor underpinning the strength of the Liberal vote in Hanley was the numerical strength of the pottery workers although this aspect tends to receive little attention by historians. It is important to recognise that, of a total electorate of 17,000, only about 2,500 at most were miners.[141] Hanley was not first and foremost a miners' seat despite the fact that the borough's former member had led the mighty Miners' Federation of Great Britain. The greater proportion of electors in the constituency was employed in the pottery industry and arguably the potter's role in determining the result of the by-election was as great, if not greater, than the miners. A number of aspects about the potters are important to remember. First, trade unionism remained relatively weak: in 1912 just 16% of the total workforce of 50,000 belonged to trade unions.[142]

Furthermore, Bernstein suggests that the ILP had made some progress among the younger generation of miner's leaders: see G. L. Bernstein, *Liberalism and Liberal Politics*, (Boston and London, 1986), p.74.

[139] Gregory, *Miners and British Politics*, p. 173. In October 1912 the executive of the (national) Miners Federation instructed its affiliated unions to establish 'political Labour Parties in all constituencies they controlled' and locality rule was abolished as it was believed this prevented good candidates being chosen', cited in McKibbin, *Evolution,* p. 27.

[140] That the miners began to identify more strongly with the Labour Party after 1912 was something which was likely to have significant national implications. Before 1914 the pictures appeared mixed. Whilst in some instances Liberals continued to support Miners Federation candidates and the Progressive Alliance remained electorally successful (Chesterfield) in others (such as North East Derbyshire) the coalition broke down and the seats were gifted to the Unionists, see M. Petter, 'Progressive Alliance' (on Chesterfield), pp. 54-56.

[141] Figures cited in *Labour Leader*, 18th July 1912.

[142] See F. Burchill and R. Ross, *History of the Potters' Union* (Hanley, 1977), p. 163. It was not until 1917 that all the different branches of the pottery industry were organised in to one union (and renamed the National Society of Pottery Workers). It was from this point that membership started to increase dramatically (especially amongst female workers). Furthermore, before 1914 many Pottery owners remained hostile to union activity on their works instead preferring to maintain direct contact with their workforce. Even as late as 1920 only around 30% of firms recognised the Potters' Union; see R. Whipp,

Secondly, allegiance to Liberalism remained extremely strong for a number of reasons.[143] There is a long held belief that industrial relations in the trade remained relatively harmonious and class conflict appeared minimal. This inhibited the growth of class consciousness and, in turn, influenced political allegiances in a way that continued to favour the Liberals but proved detrimental to concepts of independent Labour representation.[144] It is wise not to exaggerate these points, however, and assume that the potters were entirely reluctant to express dissatisfaction about various issues. Questions such as unemployment, poverty and industry specific conditions saw the potters engaged in various forms of protest during the period. Unemployment in particular saw union leaders such as Joseph Lovatt adopting a strong anti-government position although, as Whipp suggests, the potters perhaps 'did not feel oppressed' in the same way as other workers.[145] Like the miners, many of the pottery union leaders continued to have close connections with the Liberal Party[146] as did many of the pottery manufacturers (although these chose not to stand as parliamentary candidates before 1918). Altogether, the potters' loyalty to the Liberal Party remained strong before 1914 and this served particularly to sustain the Liberal vote during this period. It is essential not to overlook the influence of the pottery workforce but bear this in mind when considering political change after the war.

The 1912 by-election in Hanley demonstrated that in areas in which there had developed a strong Liberal-Labour alliance, augmented by a close relationship between local trade unionism, in this case miners, and the Liberal Associations combined with strong support from other workers, a distinctive political culture had been created. This was underpinned by the predominance of religious non-conformity. A practical

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'The Art of Good Management, Managerial Control of Work in the British Pottery Industry, 1900-1925', *International Review of Social History*, 14, 3 (1984), pp. 381-82.

[143] This has been acknowledged by a number of historians, see for example, Pelling, *Social Geography*, pp. 270-274, but is rarely considered in connection to the result of the 1912 by-election.

[144] See *Staffordshire Advertiser,* 11th April 1908 and 16th January 1909-6th February 1909. In 1912, for example, when the Potters International Conference was held in Hanley a resolution condemning capitalism and militarism was passed; see *The Times*, 27th July 1912.

[145] See R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour*, p. 176-177. Whipp suggests one aspect of this was that the potters came into regular contact with people from the wealthier classes. People such as Reid, Moody, Shufflebothom (all Liberals incidentally) helped the unions with various medical questions. This 'modified the potter's class awareness' and Whipp cites various other ways in which the potters interacted with their 'superiors' (socially for example); see R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour*, p. 177. Compared to other groups such as the miners it seems that the potters were possibly less conscious of class. This may have also been compounded by the fact that the industry was so highly stratified.

consequence of the Progressive Alliance was that in some areas Labour had been painfully slow to develop their own organisations and unable to form a distinct identity and appeal. In localities such as Hanley, where popular working-class Liberalism remained extremely strong, the ability of the fledgling Labour Party to permeate the dominance of Liberalism was likely to remain limited for some time. The potential durability of a Progressive Alliance based upon a shared ideological approach, policies and a mutual electoral agreement appears to have had a limited shelf life. From very early on in the history of the Progressive Alliance, the degree of commitment to it was always open to question. For both parties, their own interests always came first. The Liberals may have been happy to allow Labour to make some headway but only on their terms; not at their own expense. The Hanley by-election was complicated and in a way both sides were right; Edwards had been a Labour MP but in his heart he had always remained a Liberal. He was emblematic of the political culture of the area at that particular time. Hanley illustrates how the nature of the Progressive Alliance was inherently complex. Additionally, there always remained the basic fact that for Labour the demand for greater representation persisted as the most important single issue. Any perceived attempt by the Liberals to limit Labour's expansion was always going to be viewed as an act of aggression and (in itself) threatened the whole concept of a 'Progressive Alliance'. Experiences such as the Hanley by-election could simply serve to reinforce Labour's belief that the Liberals were the enemy in the same way that the Unionists were and so sour relations considerably. These experiences could contribute towards the development of a much more distinctly Labour approach and reaffirm that only true independence offered a viable alternative to co-operation with other parties.[147] Alternatively, episodes such as the Hanley by-election might reinforce the belief that co-operation *was* the best path because, divided, both parties could be severely disadvantaged. This did not happen in the case of Hanley and the Liberals had managed to win but only just; the majority had declined massively and the seat could be vulnerable in the future if circumstances were less favourable than at the by-election. As we have seen, the Liberals had been hugely advantaged by the sheer ability of their candidate and the comparative weakness of Labour's candidate. This might not

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[146] The leader of the Ovenmens' union, Thomas Edwards, for example, had a strong connection to the Liberal Party up to his death in 1911; see R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour*, p. 181.

[147] The extent of Labour's commitment to the Progressive Alliance was always to question. Some historians have even suggested that only the Liberals ever really displayed any genuine fondness for it, see, for example, M Petter, 'Progressive Alliance', p. 45.

necessarily always have been the case.

The 1912 Hanley By-Election in the National Perspective

How should we view the Hanley by-election in the national perspective? Between December 1910 and August 1914 Labour fought in twelve by-elections. The party's performance in three-cornered contests was exceedingly poor. Wilson suggests that, in fact, it was 'abysmal'.[148] The Labour Party failed to capture a single seat from either the Liberals or Conservatives. That Labour fared badly in a by-election (Hanley) was not unusual.[149] Labour intervention, however, could cause serious problems for the Liberals. Losses during the period in South Lanarkshire, Leith, South West Bethnal, Crewe and Oldham all demonstrated this. A breakdown of the Progressive Alliance could be potentially disastrous for the Liberals, although at the same time, as McKibbin recognises, the last thing the Labour leadership wanted was a 'political free-for-all' which would 'ruin the chances of the Labour Party and return the Conservatives'.[150] There were many other by-elections where the situation was not so dissimilar from Hanley where co-operation had disintegrated resulting in direct confrontation. The results (like Hanley) always saw Labour coming bottom of the poll.[151]

The Liberals clearly had no intention of abdicating local autonomy to the Labour Party despite the existence of electoral agreements. This was illustrated by the events of the Hanley by-election in 1912. Liberalism in the Potteries was able to unite on 'Liberal' issues (on this occasion land reform) and the electoral appeal of popular Liberalism (the fundamental basis of which was nonconformity) remained strong. If these issues began to lessen in prominence, however, the Liberal Party might see this unity decline. But as things stood suggestions that the post 1906 Liberal revival was held together only by issues appear to hold little truth. Liberalism remained deeply entrenched within the political culture and in this context Labour (as an independent entity) would find it extremely difficult to make significant progress.

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[148] T. Wilson, *Downfall*, p. 17. McKibbin offers a rather different interpretation of Labour's by election performance. He suggests that the seats Labour lost (including Hanley one assumes) were unrepresentative because these were areas where Lib-Labism remained 'uniquely strong' and Labour's organisation remained virtually non existent whilst in the others Labour made some 'significant gains', see R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, p. 82.

[149] R. Douglas, *History of the Liberal Party*, p. 89.

[150] R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, p. 56.

3.5: Municipal Politics in Stoke-on-Trent Before 1914

Owing to a number of reasons, including methodological complications in the analysis of pre-Federation municipal politics, the following section evaluating developments in municipal politics in Stoke-on-Trent is necessarily brief. Nonetheless it aims to provide an overview of some of the key features of this aspect before the outbreak of the First World War. Even when compared to other localities, evaluation of Stoke-on-Trent reveals a highly non-partisan context to municipal politics; party politics was of only minor importance. Analysis of municipal politics in Stoke-on-Trent prior to 1914 reveals very little (if any) party line adopted either within the monthly council meetings or during the municipal elections. There existed little in the way of heated party debate on issues. Prior to 1910 the only issue of local importance (and debate) was that of the proposed federation of the six towns and this was never in essence a party issue, it remained more of an inter-town debate.[152] Burslem, or as it perceived itself; the 'mother of the Potteries' remained hostile to federation although in the end was forced to capitulate. Despite the general non-partisan tone of municipal politics, however, the arrival of the Labour Party had an impact on the municipal politics of the area though, as in Manchester (as elsewhere) evaluation of Stoke-on-Trent illustrates the fragmented nature of Labour's progress in this respect before the outbreak of the First World War.

From its inception the Labour Party sought to obtain representation on the respective town councils (before 1910) and the Stoke-on-Trent federated Borough Council thereafter. In 1906, 10 Labour (or Socialist) candidates contested seats at the municipal elections in Hanley and Stoke yet all were heavily defeated. The same was the case the following year although 1907 did see the election of a prominent local pottery union leader, Joseph Lovatt, to the Hanley Town Council. In 1908 Labour stood 2 candidates in Hanley (W. H. Jackson and T. H. Whittingham). Significantly, Whittingham (standing under the auspices of the SDF) stood against a prominent local Liberal (Leonard Grimwade) who reacted angrily to being opposed. Grimwade argued that his opponent was a 'militant and dangerous socialist' and one of his platform speakers told

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[151] M. Petter, 'Progressive Alliance'. For other by-elections during the immediate pre-war period see R. Douglas, 'Labour in Decline' in K. D. Brown, *Essays in Anti-Labour History*, pp. 105-125.

[152] The rationale behind federation was that (in view of increasing foreign competition) the pottery manufacturers wished to improve efficiency within the industry by standardising wages and conditions which would be easier with the federation of the six towns. Naturally, civil pride underpinned opposition

one election meeting how Philip Snowden was a 'futile destructive statesman' and accused Labour of inciting riots over the issue of unemployment.[153] In response, Whittington argued that a strong Labour presence on the municipal council was essential for the 'social emancipation' of the workers.[154] Both the Labour candidates in Hanley were returned suggesting that, in this part of the six towns at least, Labour's prospects appeared positive. The fact that Whittingham had been victorious against such a well-known Liberal was significant. Of course, economic context was likely to have been of considerable significance in determining these results. The 1908 elections resulted in the composition of the town councils (combined) as including 44 Conservative, 30 Liberal, 20 Labour and 10 Independent representatives.[155] In 1910 the newly federated borough council saw contests in 11 wards. The Labour Party was unsuccessful in Longton although this was compensated by a gain in Burslem where another organiser of the potters' union was elected (Jabez Booth). It should be noted that even in the wards where Labour was not able to capture the seat, the party was able to perform respectably.[156] The years immediately preceding the outbreak of war saw a remarkably low number of seats contested for the federated Stoke-on-Trent Council; between 1911 and 1913 these were just 4, 3 and 6 respectively.[157] The 1913 contests saw Labour gain one seat (in Burslem) so by the eve of war in 1914 the Stoke-on-Trent Town Council comprised of 48 Conservatives, 35 Liberals and 21 Labour members.

Although there are some difficulties in assessing municipal politics in Stoke-on-Trent before 1914 in that none of the established parties appeared to campaign on an especially distinct party line (or adopt a partisan policy the council) it is possible to make some observations about political developments at this level. On occasions there arose evident tension between Labour and the Liberals but these occurred when the Liberals were challenged by the more overt political wing of the Labour movement (the SDF or ILP). There were few of these but nonetheless the reaction of the Liberals

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to the proposal though Burslem was also aggrieved by the fact that the importance of the railway and commerce in Stoke and Hanley was already undermining its own influence within the Potteries.

[153] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 26th October 1908 and *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 30th October 1908. 1908 had seen a number of large rallies across Stoke-on-Trent in support of the campaign to get the Right to Work Bill passed; see for example, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 11th April 1908 and *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 28th September 1908.

[154] See ibid.

[155] Note that apart from the recent additions to the council (Jackson and Whittingham) the greater number of the Labour group remained staunch Lib-Labers.

[156] In Hanley, for example, Labour lost by just 13 votes.

illustrates that while they were perfectly content to support Lib-Labers such as Enoch Edwards they were less supportive of people such as Jackson and Whittingham (as mentioned above). Especially because (as it turned out) given the right context they could actually successfully challenge even the most well-established local Liberal.

3.6: Electoral Politics in Stoke-on-Trent, 1906-1914: Conclusions

Analysis of Stoke-on-Trent illustrates the apparent limitations of the policy of an electoral alliance between the Liberal and Labour parties. For Liberals in the area, co-operation essentially meant a coalition with organised labour, principally the miners' union; it did not mean an acceptance of a national programmatic Labour Party. As has been seen, the Liberal Party in Stoke-on-Trent viewed such an arrangement as a natural development of an already strong Liberal-trade union relationship; it was not an admission of support for the idea of independent labour representation in itself. In Stoke-on-Trent, as this study shows, the relationship between the Liberal Party and the miners (and pottery workers also) was critical to political developments and prior to the outbreak of war in 1914 that alliance appeared to be remain strong. The Labour Party faced an uphill task in supplanting the Liberals as a 'natural' ally of the local workforce and under existing conditions an imminent advance of the Labour Party appeared unlikely. This is not to suggest, however, that the Labour Party was likely to remain content with its current position or that any future growth was impossible. An immediate consequence of the 1912 by-election was that it brought the trade union-Liberal coalition crashing down and from that point the miners' union in particular adopted a markedly different attitude towards their former allies. Meanwhile, the Labour Party no longer seemed to consider the advantages of a Progressive Alliance worth the price demanded. Given the historical strength of Liberal-Labour relations in industrial North Staffordshire this represented a significant shift in the politics of the area.

The experience of Stoke-on-Trent before 1914 suggests that an inevitable rise of Labour appears to have been unlikely in the foreseeable future. A major aspect of McKibbin's argument in *Evolution of the Labour Party* was that party loyalty was increasingly conditioned by class. Stoke-on-Trent was an area that was

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[157] In 1911 and 1912 Labour contested no seats.

overwhelmingly working-class yet the evidence suggests that class had not become the overriding determinant of political allegiance. Traditional loyalties remained extremely strong.

Detailed analysis of electoral politics in Stoke-on-Trent before 1914 shows how local political culture, the personal appeal of particular candidates and the actual election campaigns all had a critical impact on determining political fortunes during the Edwardian period. In this part of industrial Britain, popular working-class Liberalism, underpinned by the predominance of religious nonconformity, retained considerable influence. As we have seen, the political culture of the area had evolved in such a way that Liberalism developed an extremely close relationship with organised labour (primarily with the miners) creating what became known subsequently as 'Lib-Labism'. An immediate consequence of this was that it impeded the development of support for truly independent Labour representation. This was strikingly demonstrated in 1912 during the Hanley by-election when Samuel Finney fought the contest almost entirely on his infinitely greater claim to the seat as a miner and local man, and yet failed to convince the majority of Hanley's electors. In the immediate sense, Labour's claim that the working-classes could only viably be represented by members of their own class appears to have been largely ineffective in these sorts of areas. This presented Labour with a significant dilemma: while the party clearly wished to assert its independence and distinctiveness, there were risks associated with going too far down such a path. Ultimately it is difficult to predict the future standing of the parties had the outbreak of war not intervened; as McKibbin so astutely stated, the Edwardian political system 'was in many ways provisional and all three English parties found themselves in territory over which they had only loose control'.[158]

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[158] R. McKibbin, *Parties and People*, p. 7.

Chapter 4: Political Change in Manchester 1918-1922

4.1: The 1918 General Election in Manchester

Although the Liberals had lost seats in by-elections between 1910 and 1914 in Manchester, it seems unwise to suggest that the party was in a state of near collapse or inevitable 'decline' as some historians have suggested. Labour, on the other hand, appeared to have made only tentative progress and a natural advance for the party seemed by no means guaranteed. The post-war re-alignment of electoral politics in Britain was dramatic. In both localities examined here the position of the two left-of-centre parties was very largely reversed. Some historians have placed considerable emphasis on sociological change contending that this was fundamental in influencing political realignment in the aftermath of the First World War.[1] Whilst sociological change cannot be discounted, and few would claim it had no impact at all, this alone does not suffice in explaining political change from 1918. The following section examines electoral politics and political change in Manchester in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, focusing upon the general elections of 1918 and 1922 and two by-elections which took place in the intervening period. Detailed examination of these contests reveals that issues, policy and personalities ought to be recognised as a fundamental aspect in determining party fortunes during this critical period in British political history. The appeal, forcefulness and immediate relevance of a party's programme plus the candidates' abilities in the presentation of policy was of critical importance in changing voter allegiance.[2]

The 1918 general election resulted in the Liberal Party losing all of its parliamentary representation in Manchester although this was not because the party's unity had completely disintegrated or its organisation had been entirely smashed. In Manchester the Liberals were not decimated by wartime events; neither was a Labour advance immediately inevitable, the party found it difficult to maintain electoral stability in the years immediately following 1918. This presents a significant contrast to

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[1] See for example, R. McKibbin, *Evolution*; K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour* and H. Pelling, *Origins*.

[2] Many historians pay inadequate attention to the role of individual candidates in political development. One exception, however, is Howell who identifies the role of candidates as of crucial importance in Labour's growing electoral support after 1918; see D. Howell, *Macdonald's People: Labour Identities and Crisis, 1922-1931* (Oxford, 2002).

Stoke-on-Trent where, as we will see later, the Labour Party established a strong hold on parliamentary politics early in the immediate post-war period. But even there, as in Manchester, the 1923 general election demonstrated that the Liberal Party could still capture parliamentary seats despite persistent difficulties and against determined opposition. The following section explores the potential explanations for these advances, setbacks and regional variations in the post-war period.

The Context of the 1918 General Election in Manchester: Timing, the 'Coupon' and the Electorate[3]

After by-election losses for the Liberals during 1912 the position of the parties in Manchester was evenly split: the Conservatives, Labour and Liberals each possessed two parliamentary seats in the city. The Liberals held Manchester North and South-West, the Conservatives North-West and South Manchester and the Labour Party East and North-East Manchester. After the boundary changes of 1918 Manchester was now comprised of ten parliamentary constituencies. The Labour Party's strategy in 1918 was to concentrate on seats already held but the extent of their ambitions were clear and reflected by an increase in the total number of candidates put forward. Labour decided to contest five seats in 1918, a slight increase in ambition within the city although this was in the context of the four additional seats. The Conservatives were also determined to improve upon their pre-war position in Manchester and contested nine seats[4] while the Liberal Party contested only six.

From the beginning of the 1918 general election the Liberals argued strongly against the timing of the contest: William Royle, Chairman of the MLF's General Committee declared how he regarded an election at that time as 'disastrous in the present divided opinion as to the leadership of the party'.[5] Officers of the MLF had even sent deputations to Lloyd George and Asquith declaring a strong objection to an immediate appeal being 'forced upon the country' because it would be 'against the national and allied interest and the armed forces would be unable to exercise their vote under

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[3] For detailed analysis of the wartime spilt and the way in which this impacted upon the Liberal Party (nationally) to fight the 1918 general election see T. Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War* (Cambridge, 1986) pp. 408-423.

[4] This includes Gorton where the Conservative candidate was not officially sanctioned and ran as an independent Conservative.

[5] See *Manchester Liberal Federation Miscellaneous Letters*, July 11th 1918.

conditions of full information and mature judgement'.[6] Liberal hostility to the calling of an election continued throughout the campaign and centred on issues of manipulation (i.e. timing the election in order to guarantee a Coalition victory) and the morality of excluding a significant proportion of servicemen. Tanner suggests that Liberal objections to an immediate appeal to the country were largely based upon the fact that the party's organisation was unprepared.[7] He contends that the Liberals had been hoping for reunion and an immediate election came as a major shock. On top of the Liberal Party's own internal troubles, the boundary changes required the reorganisation of constituency associations which put them under considerable pressure.[8] Party records in Manchester and the Midlands, however, suggest that an election was widely anticipated for quite some time before the armistice.[9] As early as February 1918 the MLF had begun to formulate plans for a forthcoming general election and in Manchester there is nothing to suggest that the party's organisation had completely broken down when faced with these problems. Certainly the MLF's finances had been significantly depleted although this appears to have been in hand and in the process of being rectified.[10] We should also remember that these difficulties confronted all of the parties, not just the Liberals.

Consideration of the operation of the 'coupon' provides an essential context of the 1918 general election. Whether a candidate claimed to be in receipt of the 'coupon' undoubtedly determined many political fortunes. Officially, as the *Manchester Guardian* reported, the policy of the government was that it would only support candidates if they declared themselves 'an out-and-out supporter of the Coalition... [thus a Liberal candidate would] not be supported by the government unless he [was] an avowed supporter of Lloyd George.'[11] Wherever a Liberal candidate had refused to

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[6] *Manchester Guardian*, 15th November, 1918.

[7] D. Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 404.

[8] Boundary changes presented some constituencies with tremendous difficulties and regional officials had clearly experienced problems in assisting all of the associations within their area, see, for example, report by secretary of the Midland Liberal Federation, *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 21st March 1919. In Manchester it seems the MLF's organisation responded effectively to a fast moving political situation, for example, the MLF began registration work as soon as the new register was published in 1918; see *Manchester Liberal Federation Minutes*, 3rd June 1918.

[9] See *Manchester Liberal Federation Minutes*, 20th February 1918, 4th March 1918 and 14th October 1918, see also *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 21st March 1919.

[10] See *Manchester Liberal Federation Finance Committee Minutes*, 4th September 1914, 31st January 1915 and 21st July 1918.

[11] *Manchester Guardian*, 15th November, 1918.

give complete support to the Coalition Government, endorsement would be given to another (usually Conservative) candidate. This meant Liberal candidates were expected to give absolute and unconditional support to the Lloyd George administration; implicit or half-hearted support was insufficient. In Manchester, as elsewhere, in seats occupied by Liberal members the coupon was awarded to their Unionist opponents. Many Liberals were placed in an impossible position; whilst most did not wish to be perceived as anti-government, they could not bring themselves to pledge unconditional support to Lloyd George if it might mean betraying their fundamental Liberal principles at some point. In a way, the Liberals in Manchester contributed to their own electoral downfall because they believed their Liberalism too sacred to risk.

The position of the Labour Party was more clearly defined. The decision to withdraw from the Coalition Government marked the beginning of the complete independence of the Labour Party although it should be noted that Labour itself was not completely united on the issue of the party's withdrawal from the Coalition. In Manchester, J. R. Clynes even risked expulsion from his party because he initially refused to resign his cabinet position. Clynes believed that an immediate withdrawal could handicap Labour candidates because it might 'stamp them out as men who had severed themselves from the national service'.[12] In the end, however, he was forced to resign his ministerial position.

Although not directly hostile to the prime minister himself, the Liberals in Manchester remained lukewarm to say the least. The *Manchester Guardian* argued that the Coalition took 'the heart out of politics and [definitely] ought not to continue beyond the occasion of national emergency such as a war'.[13] The same newspaper also pointed out that, in any case, coalitions never possessed any 'real bond of unity' and were simply 'artificial' combinations of parties. The MLF, however, adopted a pragmatic approach resolving to impartially support candidates selected by the general councils of the respective parliamentary divisions of the city whether the candidates were Coalitionists or not. [14]

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[12] *Manchester Guardian*, 15th November, 1918.

[13] *Manchester Guardian*, 16th November, 1918.

[14] See *Manchester Liberal Federation Minutes*, November 1918. This policy was supported by Asquith; local federations could decide themselves whether they chose free Liberals or Coalition Liberals.

The Liberal parliamentary candidates in Manchester in 1918 were all prominent local party officials; C.T. Needham, Tom Stott, Philip Oliver, Arthur Haworth, Walter Butterworth and G. F. Burditt. It was initially assumed that Coalition endorsement would be given to three of these (Stott, Needham and Oliver) and that Needham would be given an unopposed return by the withdrawal of the Unionist candidate in Hulme. All of the Liberal candidates claimed some degree of support for the government yet the exact extent of their support varied enormously. Butterworth, Burditt and Haworth, for example, made it clear they could only support the Coalition as long it did not impinge upon their fundamental Liberal principles. In a letter to the MLF, Burditt declared that he 'found it impossible to give an unqualified pledge of support because doing so would mean sacrificing freedom; one of the dearest principles of Liberalism'[15] He also intimated how deeply unhappy he was that there had been no mention of Free Trade in any of the statements to emerge from the Coalition: throughout the campaign he described himself as a Liberal Free Trader. At one of his meetings Butterworth also told his audience he was 'a Liberal without prefix or suffix'.[16] Of all the Manchester Liberal candidates in 1918 Butterworth was the most openly hostile towards the Coalition; he told one meeting that he felt the Coalition was primarily a 'cunning device of party politicians who wanted to grasp power for another five years.'[17] Generally speaking, however, it would have been difficult for electors to accurately identify the official government candidates from the candidate's admissions alone.

An aspect of the 1918 general election which caused widespread dissatisfaction was the position of absentee voters who remained on war service. In Manchester, the estimated total number of absentee voters was in the region of 65,000 to 70,000[18] with the average number per constituency more than 6,000; in some, Hulme and Platting for example, the figures were as high as 9,000 and 10,000.[19] Whilst registration officers expressed optimism that ballot papers could reach overseas voters in time, doubts quickly arose as to the reliability of such optimism. The mechanism by which the army authorities had to operate the voting procedure was hugely complex. Three days after the calling of the

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[15] Burditt reported in the *Manchester Guardian*, 22nd November, 1918.
[16] See *Manchester Guardian* and *Manchester Evening News*, 23rd November 1918.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Figure cited in *Manchester Guardian*, 22nd November, 1918, see also article 'reaching the soldiers: Manchester's experience', *Manchester Guardian*, 27th November 1918.
[19] *Manchester Guardian*, 27th November, 1918.

election the army was required to supply registration officers with the latest addresses of soldiers formally resident in the area. In Manchester, as in other parts of the country, this simply could not be done in time so the town clerk was forced to postpone giving the lists to the party agents until the 20th November, much later than was usual. It was largely assumed that as much as half the city's electorate would effectively be disenfranchised because the precise addresses of men in the field were simply unavailable. Only 400 of the 5,000 to 6,000 proxy voters were returned.[20] Of the 9,180 absent voters in Hulme, a current (general) location was known for 7,357 although nearly 2,000 of these remained untraceable; this meant that a fifth of the electorate was effectively disenfranchised. It was also estimated that about 1,500 more would not receive papers because the addresses which had been provided were woefully inadequate.[21] The situation was similar across the city and indeed across the country.

The 1918 General Election Campaign in Manchester

The 1918 general election saw contests in nine of the ten Manchester constituencies. There were three-cornered contests in Blackley, Rusholme and Hulme where Labour candidates fought both Liberals and Conservatives. Two constituencies (Hulme and Gorton) saw unofficial Labour candidates while the remainder saw straight fights between the Liberals and Conservatives (Moss Side, Exchange and Withington) or Labour and Conservatives (Clayton and Ardwick).

Three-Cornered or Multi-Party Contests

In Blackley the Liberal candidate, Philip Oliver, was a young Barrister[22] who had been secretary of the county Red Cross during the war and had devoted most of his time to that cause. His Unionist opponent, Harold Briggs, was a local manufacturer with a presence in the constituency whilst Labour's A. E. Townend was an employee of the postal service. Oliver began his campaign by declaring himself as a firm supporter of the Coalition, albeit a qualified one in that he was unable to 'give a definite pledge for an indefinite period'.[23] In an unusual approach to the situation he told voters that 'the more Liberals supported [the prime minister] the more Liberal and democratic his

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[20]Proxy voters included men serving in Egypt, Macedonia and other distant fronts and those in the navy.
[21]*Manchester Guardian*, November 27th 1918.
[22] Details from *Manchester City News*, 16th November 1918.
[23] See *Manchester Guardian*, 27th November 1918.

programme would be' so he would support the Coalition 'until it cut across some vital principles of Liberalism'.[24] Later on in the campaign, however, Oliver appeared much more cautious declaring that he was standing first as a Liberal and then as a supporter of the Coalition. He spoke at length on foreign policy suggesting that Britain ought to adopt a firmer stance with regards Turkey which he said had been a 'terrible oppressor'; it was Britain's duty to see that justice was done for the Armenians 'many of whom had been massacred'.[25] He elaborated extensively on the land question claiming that if necessary it should be purchased compulsorily in order to develop proper housing schemes.[26] Although the Conservative Harold Briggs went to great lengths to claim that he had 'great respect' for Labour, he could not perceive how anyone could vote for 'pacifists at the present time' and presented himself throughout as an especially strong supporter of the Coalition.[27]

In Rusholme the Conservative candidate, R. B. Stoker, had been elected unopposed for South Manchester the previous March after the division's sitting member (Philip Glazebrook) had been killed on active service. Stoker was a local Conservative heavyweight, a Director of Manchester Liners Ltd, President of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce as well as a Director of the Ship Canal Company; he was a staunch protectionist. The Liberal candidate, Walter Butterworth was likewise a respected local Liberal official, well-known for his social and educational work and as Chairman of the Art Committee of the city council. Interned in Germany since the outbreak of hostilities, he had been released earlier in 1918. Labour's candidate, Mrs Pethick-Lawrence, was a long-time women's activist. From the beginning of the campaign Stoker tried to distinguish himself from his 'pacifist friends' and adopted a hard-line towards the peace settlement.[28] He attempted in particular to capitalise on his Liberal opponent's personal position during the war. Butterworth had been interned at Ruhleben and the Conservatives suggested publicly throughout that his experience had amounted to nothing more than an extended holiday, a point which he might have unwittingly reinforced by asserting that he had been treated very well and had spent his time improving his German.

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[24] Ibid.
[25] *Manchester Guardian*, 3rd December 1918.
[26] See *Manchester Guardian*, 6th December 1918.
[27] See *Manchester City News*, 7th December 1918.
[28] See *Manchester Guardian*, 16th November 1918.

Of all Manchester's Liberal candidates, Walter Butterworth adopted the most overtly independent stance in 1918 making it clear that he would not stand as a supporter of the Coalition. He adopted a fierce line against the timing of the election telling one audience that 'the present election in which three million men could not take part could not [be seen] as a proper expression of national opinion'.[29] He argued that significant social reform would be unlikely to materialise given the reactionaries the prime minister was associating with. The greatest concern for the Liberal Party in Rusholme was a potential split in the 'progressive' vote and Butterworth himself intimated that had he not been in the field at the time he would not have contested the seat. [30] Labour's candidate, Mrs Pethick Lawrence, was the first woman to stand in a parliamentary contest in Manchester and was one of the few candidates who attempted to address a wider range of issues including war-related issues such as separation allowances, pensions for dependents[31] and broader questions such as health, insurance, education and leisure.[32]

Hulme saw another multi-party contest, Conservative, Liberal, (independent) Labour and an independent. The Liberal candidate, C. T. Needham, had been member for South-West Manchester from January 1910 until its re-organisation. [33] Another prominent Liberal activist he was an iron and steel merchant, director of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, Ship Canal Company, Manchester and District Banking Company and governor of the university. The Unionist candidate Major Nall was another Manchester businessman, director of a local transport firm. He had served in Egypt and at Gallipoli during the war and was the only candidate in Manchester in 1918 who chose to wear his military uniform on the election platforms. The (unofficial) Labour candidate Alfred Hilton was secretary of the Carters Union. There was also an independent (George Milner) for the National Federation of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors (hereafter NFDSS) Needham had been offered the Coalition ticket and Bonar Law had allegedly even appealed to Nall to stand down. Both refused these requests although Needham was still widely reported as the 'officially accepted' Coalition

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[29] *Manchester Guardian*, 22nd November 1918.
[30] *Manchester Guardian*, 5th December 1918.
[31] *Manchester Evening News*, 2nd December 1918.
[32] *Manchester Evening News*, 26th November 1918.

candidate. During the 1918 contest Needham was ill and therefore prevented from taking any active part in his campaign. Effectively run by way of letters to the press and with the help of the party workers in his constituency, little can be ascertained in relation to his policy agenda though a number of well-known local businessmen spoke on Needham's behalf, largely on the basis of Free Trade. These included Conservative heavyweights such as Tootal Broadhurst who proclaimed Needham 'the best commercial representative' Manchester had ever had.[34] Needham's opponent, Major Nall, tried to make some capital out of Needham's stance on the Maurice debate and throughout the campaign focused principally upon the 'meting out of justice to the Kaiser and the fullest reparation by Germany' alongside Tariff Reform.[35]

In Gorton, a three-way contest saw Labour's former Minister of Pensions, John Hodge, challenged by a Conservative, H. White, and a Socialist Labour Party candidate, J. T Murphy. There had been some confusion over Hodge's candidature. Earlier in the year the Gorton Trades Council had decided to replace Hodge with J. Binns of the engineers union. The national executive refused to sanction this however and Hodge was consequently nominated, helped no doubt by his withdrawal from the Coalition.[36] Throughout the campaign Hodge focused attention principally on the position of workers and post-war reconstruction, calling in particular for workers to have a greater share in the management of industry. It was widely assumed that Hodge's work as Minister of Pensions would give him a tremendous advantage especially amongst female voters, the wives and mothers of men who had fought.[37]

Liberal v Conservative/ Coalition Contests

Two of Manchester's three straight fights between Liberals and Conservatives were conducted in predominantly middle-class suburbs (Moss Side and Withington). The third was fought in the commercial heartland of the city, Exchange. Here the Liberals put up one of the city's most senior Liberals Arthur Haworth, who had represented Manchester South- West for eleven years. Chairman of the Royal Exchange, he was

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[33] The new constituency of Hulme included the old South-West division (Medlock Street and St. George's) with the addition of Moss Side West. It was thus comprised of two 'slum' wards (Medlock Street and St George's) and the suburban ward of Moss Side West.
[34] See *Manchester Guardian*, December 10th 1918.
[35] See *Manchester City News*, 11th December 1918.
[36] R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, p. 107.

also President of the MLF. His Unionist opponent John Randles had sat for Manchester North-West since capturing the seat at a by-election in 1912. Like Haworth, he was also a well known local businessman. Both candidates, therefore, had been sitting members at the dissolution. Free Trade remained the only issue of importance in Exchange and Haworth told electors that it was 'not an eternal commandment written on tables of stone but...a wise commercial arrangement that has stood the test of peace and the strain of war, leading us into prosperity in peace and saving us from disaster in war.'[38] Many notable men involved in the cotton trade came to support Haworth. Randles' campaign was more nationalistic and anti-Free Trade than anywhere else in Manchester. Appealing to electors solely in the 'national interest', he advised his former constituents to 'support the Coalition and drop the clap-trap of Free Trade'.[39] He told one meeting that they had a choice between 'Lloyd George and himself or Haworth and Asquith'.[40]

In Moss Side, the Liberal manufacturer Tom Stott faced the Conservative Gerald Hurst, a Barrister and law lecturer at Manchester University who had only just returned from active service. Stott declared himself a supporter of the Coalition and claimed it would be impossible to carry on the affairs of the nation at present by means of party government. He addressed a wide range of issues (housing, pensions, employment, health and land) and gave considerable attention to issues such as likely unemployment as a result of demobilisation. His opponent, however, focused exclusively on the war and enlisted the platform support of officers who had served under him. Having initially taken a strong pro-conscription stance, he later changed his position after it became apparent that this was deeply unpopular with his audiences, though he continued to adopt an extremely hard line in respect to conscientious objectors;[41] under pressure, Stott had to deny that he supported their immediate release.[42]

Another largely middle-class suburban constituency and one which Labour had again chosen not to contest was Withington. A straightforward fight, the Liberals adopted a local businessman, G. F. Burditt, and the Conservatives a bank manager, R. A. D.

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[37] *Manchester Guardian*, 11th December 1918.
[38] See *Manchester Guardian*, 30th November 1918.
[39] See *Manchester City News*, 4th December 1918.
[40] Ibid.
[41] *Manchester Guardian*, 13th December 1918.
[42] See ibid.

Carter.[43] Like Butterworth in Rusholme, Burditt adopted a strongly independent stance throughout the campaign arguing that it was impossible for him to give 'any coalition an unqualified pledge'; although (so he stated) he had been offered Coalition endorsement he had chosen to decline it. Burditt focused significant attention upon the case for the establishment of a league of nations and spoke at length of his absolute objection to conscription. He emphasised the need of a 'just peace... not a policy of vengeance and hatred'.[44] His Conservative opponent adopted a somewhat odd position as a self-declared anti-democrat, expressing throughout the campaign his dislike for democracy because it 'encouraged the lazy and ignorant to organise riots and revolutions'.[45]

Labour v Conservative Contests

The remaining two constituencies in Manchester were contested by Labour and Conservative candidates. Clayton included the greater part of the former Manchester East constituency and was largely a working-class district including many railway employees and miners. Labour's John Sutton had represented Manchester East since January 1910 and was expected to retain his (reconstituted) seat in 1918.[46] As the *Manchester City News* reported, Sutton was widely recognised as a 'Labour leader of undoubted ability and independence'.[47] His Conservative opponent Edward Hopkinson, a director of an engineering firm in the district and son of a former Lord Mayor of the city, was known for his social work in the area. Perceived to be a strong candidate for the Conservatives, there was some intimation that his candidature had not been supported from party headquarters in London[48] and he had certainly not been given Coalition endorsement. Sutton was extremely critical of the Coalition Government and the timing of the general election, declaring that he was not going to be 'muzzled or committed to the Prime Minister'.[49] In terms of issues Sutton focused attention on various aspects of post-war reconstruction (housing, education and other social reform)

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[43] There had been discussion of a Labour candidate (H. M. Richardson from the National Union of Journalists) although nothing came of this, see *Manchester Evening News*, 23rd November 1918.
[44] See *Manchester Guardian*, 22nd November 1918.
[45] See *Manchester Guardian*, 11th December 1918.
[46] The new parliamentary division of Clayton included a large part of the old Manchester East constituency including Bradford and Beswick and now also incorporated Newton Heath (which had previously been in the old Manchester North-East division). It thus comprised a combination of the 'better' working-class districts (such as Bradford) and the more socially mixed Newton Heath.
[47] *Manchester City News*, 10th December 1918.
[48] *Manchester City News*, 12th December 1918.

though he spent most of the campaign condemning the election and the Coalition. Throughout the campaign the local Liberal Association issued various statements in support of his candidature.[50]

Labour's candidate in Ardwick, Thomas Lowth, (a member of the city council and General Secretary of the General Workers Union), focused exclusively on aspects of post-war reconstruction affecting workers, particularly wages and conditions including the proposal of a maximum eight hour day. He argued that a 'state unemployment scheme was not wanted by working classes [but] state employment' though he contended that ' there was no trusting a Coalition Government to do anything for the worker'.[51] He argued for combined industrial and political effort, citing a recent victory by the railwaymen in securing an eight hour day as evidence of what could be achieved, and arguing similar improvements could be obtained for the whole of the working class if there was a significant increase in the number of Labour representatives. He told voters not to expect anything from the Coalition Government because it could simply not be trusted.[52] Lowth was opposed by both Manchester Conservative Councillor Augustine Hailwood (a large employer in the area) and a candidate from the National Party (Lieutenant Colonel H. M. Stephenson).

Inevitably, all candidates were forced to discuss their personal roles during the war. Haworth, who had commanded the first Volunteer Battalion of the Cheshire Regiment, and Tom Stott, a member of the Cheshire Volunteer Regiment, were both anxious to stress this in an attempt to counter suggestions they had not played their part during the war. Although none of the Labour candidates had seen active service since most were above the recruitment age, they too were anxious to reiterate their roles in recruitment, relief committees and such like. At the local level this no doubt increased perceptions of the party's respectability even though their leadership included a number of high profile pacifists.

As has been shown the 1918 general election campaign saw policy proposals and issues

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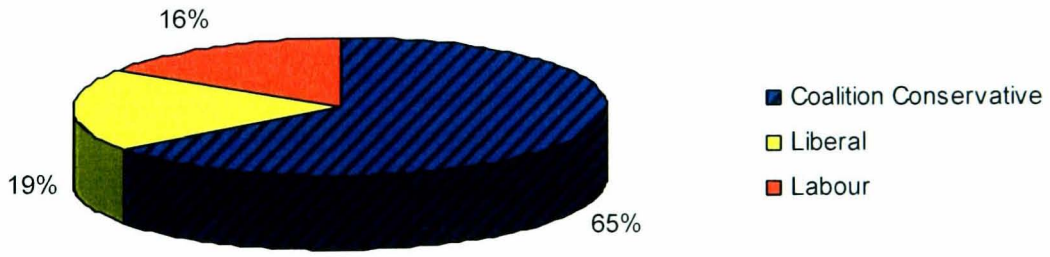
[49] See, for example, *Manchester Guardian*, 28th and 29th November 1918.
[50] See *Manchester Guardian*, 14th December 1918.
[51] See *Manchester Guardian*, 7th December 1918.
[52] See *Manchester Guardian*, 7th December 1918.

focused on questions of the peace, post-war reconstruction and the timing of the election itself. In some constituencies the Liberal candidates appeared more progressive than in others and Conservatives differed in their moderation. Labour stood out, however, as the party with an 'entirely independent standpoint' and concentrated on future aims.[53] As one Liberal organiser candidly stated after the election, the 'fact [was] that the Labour manifesto commanded the assent of Liberal [supporters]' whilst the Liberals appeal 'fell absolutely flat because it never had any opportunity of getting home to the minds of the people'.[54] Timing had also been critical; the same Liberal official believed 'the programme was tight when it came, but it had come too late'.[55] The critical topic of debate between Unionists and Liberals tended to be the continuation of the Coalition but as the campaign progressed the Conservatives began to adopt a much harsher approach to the peace settlement. Liberal candidates rarely engaged the Tories on this issue but gave prominence to the need to establish a league of nations. In Manchester, the evidence suggests that the Labour candidates remained focused on issues affecting the working-classes, avoiding becoming too embroiled in debates concerning either the peace settlement or the continuation of the Coalition.

The 1918 General Election in Manchester: Results and Analysis[56]

Three-Cornered Contests

Fig. 1 Rusholme (Turnout 62.9%)



[53] See *Manchester City News*, 14th December 1918
[54] See the secretary's report on the 1918 general election, *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 21st March 1919.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Swing cannot be calculated for the 1918 General Election due to boundary changes

Fig. 2 Hulme (Turnout 52.9%)

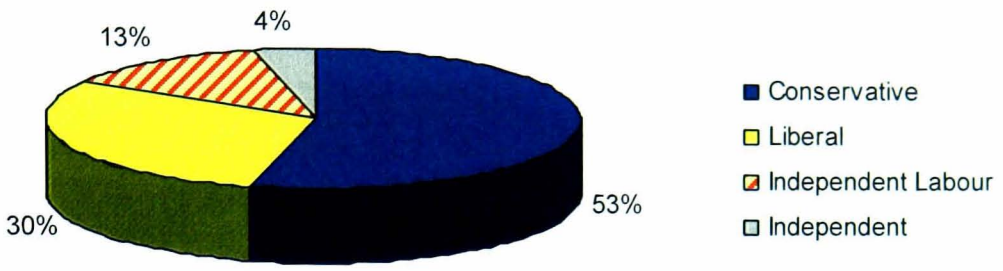
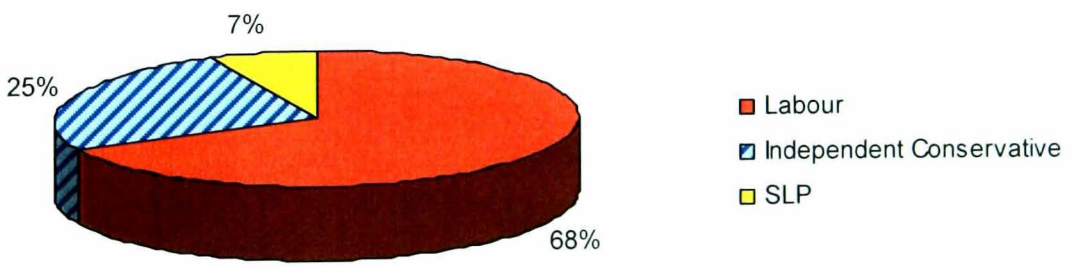


Fig. 3 Blackley (Turnout 58.9%)

Fig. 4 Gorton (Turnout 58%)



Liberal v. Conservative/Coalition Contests

Fig. 5 Moss Side (Turnout 50%)

Fig. 6 Withington (Turnout 61%)

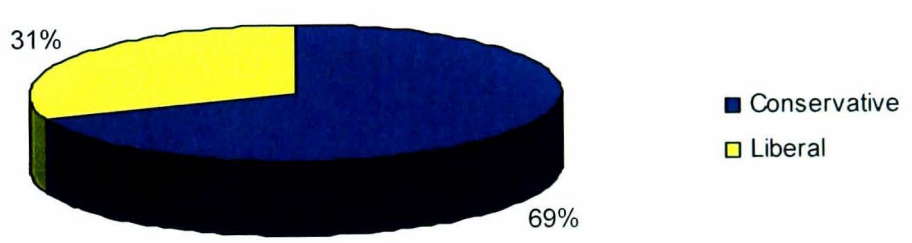
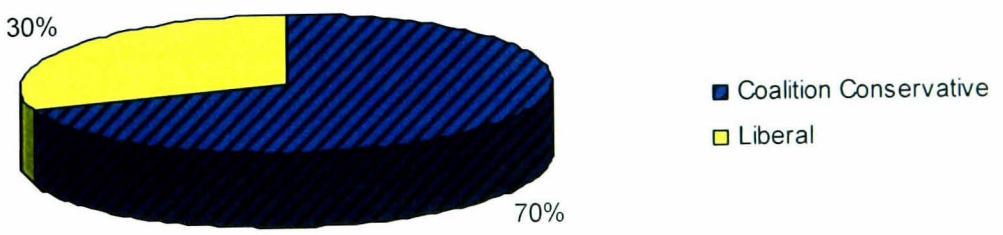


Fig. 7 Exchange (Turnout 51%)



Labour v. Conservative Contests

Fig. 8 Clayton (Turnout 57.5%)

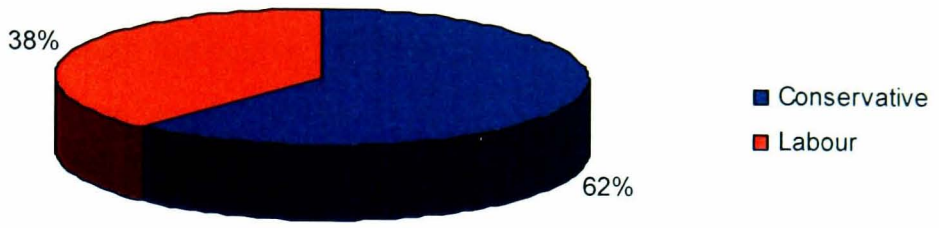
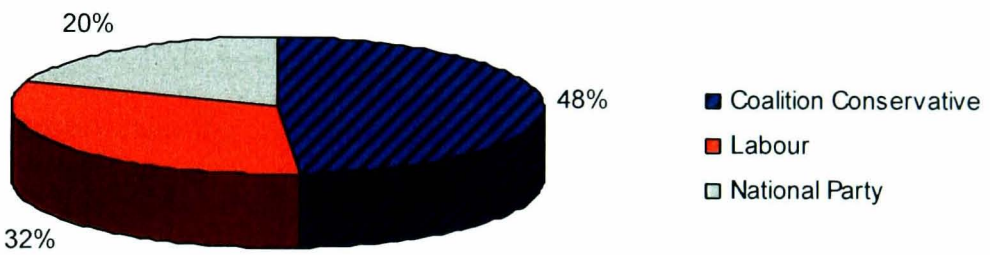


Fig. 9 Ardwick (Turnout 47.9%)



Compared to previous contests, the 1918 general election saw considerable apathy amongst electors; as the *Manchester Guardian* reported, audiences were 'small and spiritless' and it was estimated that no more than about an eighth of the total electorate had actually even heard a speech.[57] This was in marked contrast to previous elections in the city which had always seen large and enthusiastic audiences at all the respective meetings.[58] Another noticeable feature in Manchester was that local candidates predominated: of the 22 candidates who stood in 1918 only one, Sir J. Randles in Exchange, did not come from the area.

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[57] *Manchester Guardian*, 12th December 1918.

[58] Many men still remained abroad and outbreak of influenza may also have contributed to a decline in numbers of people attending political meetings in 1918.

The results represented an overwhelming victory for the Coalition and a bitter disappointment for the city's Liberals. Across Manchester, the Unionist candidates received more than half the total votes polled, obtaining an overall vote of 91,968 from a total of 161,703. The total Labour and Liberal votes (with seven and six candidates respectively) amounted to 35,452 and 28,854. In Manchester, as across the country, Lloyd George had swept the board principally on the basis of his status as war leader in a 'most unscrupulous exploitation of a bewildered and excited public'. [59] Of Manchester's 10 seats, eight returned Unionists; the remaining two returned Labour members including Clynes who was unopposed. Four candidates in Manchester had received official Coalition endorsement, three Conservatives (Randles, Stoker and Hailwood in Exchange, Rusholme and Ardwick) and just the one Liberal (Needham in Hulme) who had repudiated it. The officially-endorsed Coalitionists were returned with 65%, 70% and 48% of the vote (see figs. 1, 7 and 9) representing winning margins of 46%, 40% and 17%. The coupon had clearly contributed to the scale of these victories although in Withington, Blackley, Clayton and Moss Side 'un-couponed' Conservatives also won with significant majorities, 39%, 30%, 23% and 30% (see figs. 6, 3, 8 and 5). In Hulme (see fig. 2) where Needham had been offered the coupon but had declined it, the Conservative also won with a majority of 25%.[60] The Conservative triumph in Manchester cannot be solely attributed to the operation of the coupon. The significant swing to the Conservatives included districts of traditional Liberal strength, the former Manchester North, South and South-West constituencies. Across the country the swing to the Conservatives (irrespective of the operation of the coupon) was enormous. No doubt the coupon forced voters to make a decision about which candidates they determined to be 'patriotic' and 'official' and those perceivably 'unpatriotic' and 'anti-government'. The coupon damaged the Liberals prospects because it forced them to declare publicly their opposition to Lloyd George's Coalition. As analysis of the 1918 general election campaign in Manchester shows, Liberal candidates varied significantly in their willingness to 'support' the Coalition: Needham, Stott and Oliver seemed prepared to give greater support than Butterworth, Burditt and Haworth who all made it clear they were 'free Liberals opposed to caucus dictation'. [61]

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[59] G. D. H. Cole, *History of the Labour Party Since 1914* (New York, 1969) p. 85.
[60] Election details from F.W.S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results,* pp. 184-194.
[61] See *Manchester Guardian*, 30th December 1918.

A low turnout of 55% across the city reflected the prevalent mood of apathy and disinterest. Less than a fifth of the armed service electorate had voted and it was reported that a proportion of these had in fact spoilt their ballot papers, some even writing 'demobilise us first' on them. To some this fact represented a stark indication of how those in the armed services felt about this untimely 'snatch' election. Analysis of the Liberal and Labour vote in the constituencies where they faced each other helps shed valuable light on the comparative levels of support of the respective parties. Of the three-cornered contests, Rusholme and Hulme (see figs. 1 and 2) saw the Liberals out-poll Labour opponents. Given the suburban character of these divisions this is unsurprising. If anything Labour's result in Rusholme was very impressive; for a female candidate with practically no permanent organisation against a prominent local Liberal, Labour's first attempt at contesting the seat saw the party perform respectably. Perhaps this serves to demonstrate just how badly the Liberals had performed in Manchester in 1918. This was part of the city which might rightly have been considered natural Liberal heartland yet the party only just managed to out-poll Labour and the Conservatives won with a winning margin of nearly 46%. The Liberals did better in Hulme where Needham obtained nearly 30% of the total vote but he was still nearly 25% behind the winning non-couponed Conservative; the (independent) Labour candidate, with no preparation or formal organisation, obtained nearly 3000 votes (13% of the total). Although it contained identifiable slum areas Hulme was a socially mixed constituency and, owing to the boundary changes, it is difficult to compare the 1918 result with previous elections. Ultimately, although the 1918 general election saw the Liberals out-poll Labour by nearly 2.5 to 1, future prospects for a Labour challenge in this seat did not appear altogether dismal. Furthermore, should an official Labour candidate with greater preparation and organisation contest the seat, untold damage could be done to Liberal prospects even if Labour could not win. In Blackley (see fig. 3) the Liberal and Labour vote was more or less equally divided, 20% and 25% respectively. One of the most significant features of the 1918 general election in Manchester was that the Liberal versus Labour contests took place in areas previously considered natural Liberal territory. Though Labour possessed no real prospects of capturing these seats imminently, the party's intervention would seriously undermine the Liberal Party's chances of overtaking the Conservatives in these constituencies.

The 1918 General Election in the National Perspective

The 1918 general election recorded one of the most sweeping electoral victories in British politics. Undoubtedly, Liberal organisers expected to fare badly but the scale of the Coalition's victory was unforeseen. Under-stating the position somewhat the *Liberal Magazine* concluded that 'the situation created for the party [was] one of delicacy and difficulty.'[62] The *Manchester Guardian* believed the outcome was the result of 'a widespread desire on the part of the electorate to give the Coalition Government an opportunity of concluding peace and of carrying out the work of demobilisation [and] a wave of Conservatism prompted by the political events.'[63] The *Manchester Guardian* bitterly despised how the results had been achieved by 'seizing upon a moment of confusion and excitement' and had served to turn 'representative institutions into something of a mockery'.[64] Observers immediately attempted to consider why Liberal candidates had performed so badly. One newspaper reported that 'rightly or wrongly, it had come to be assumed that the Liberals did not desire such drastic measures [in respect of the peace settlement] and that they might display a tender sentiment towards a still ruthless and arrogant enemy'.[65] For many electors it seems all Liberal candidates were perceived to be 'soft' on Germany. Another factor which in all probability served to underpin the scale of the Conservative victory was the female vote. Initially it was reported that the new female electors appeared apathetic and 'difficult to move' although, as one Liberal official observed afterwards, once they did engage with the election 'whatever class they belonged to they gave in bulk an anti-German vote'.[66] Furthermore, neither can the exceptional personal appeal of the Prime Minister be under-estimated. As the *Manchester City News* concluded the election was 'a personal triumph for Lloyd George who has a magnetism that few possess and who inspires faith and commands support'.[67] Another local newspaper, however, was less generous in its (bitter and sarcastic) assessment that electors had voted simply for 'the legend of the man who had saved England, Europe and civilisation'.[68]

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[62] *Liberal Magazine,* December 1918.
[63] *Manchester Guardian*, 30th December 1918.
[64] Ibid.
[65] *Manchester City News*, 14th January 1919.
[66] See Midland Liberal Federation report evaluating the 1918 general election, *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 21st March 1919.
[67] *Manchester City News*, 4th January 1919.
[68] *Oldham Chronicle*, 4th January 1919.

Although the 1918 general election was undoubtedly a disaster for the Liberal Party in that the party lost all of its parliamentary seats in Manchester, there was not a complete collapse of its electoral base. No candidates lost their deposits and the percentage of the vote obtained by Liberal candidates ranged from 20% to 35% which, although extremely low compared to previous contests, was easily explained by the political situation. The local organisation had not fallen apart and despite a slight deterioration in party unity, the party split was hardly severe compared to elsewhere. The political situation before and during the 1918 general election did not in itself fatally undermine the Liberal Party in Manchester even though defeat was deeper than anything the party had encountered previously. Organised Liberalism would face monumental difficulties over the coming years and party managers locally and nationally clearly recognised this fact. They did not believe, however, that Liberalism had been wounded forever because, as one local newspaper articulated, 'it would be rash in the last degree to take the 1918 general election as providing any trustworthy criteria as to the relationships of parties to the electorate'.[69] That would only become apparent in subsequent elections.

Clarke suggests that the main premises underpinning the Liberal vote in 1910 had by 1918 been destroyed and new voters simply acquired new habits of voting.[70] 1918 itself, however, more fundamentally represented triumph for the forces of reaction; anti-Coalition candidates fared badly across the board and the Liberals were uniquely disadvantaged in consequence of both issues and the political situation. Labour performed only marginally better than before the outbreak of war although in some areas such as Stoke-on-Trent (which will be examined below) the party made a significant leap forward. Furthermore, as Tanner asserts, focus on the performance of the Asquithian Liberals underestimates the real level of Liberal support and decline can more accurately be determined to have developed from there.[71] The Progressive Alliance collapsed, the Liberal Party remained disunited and Labour moved in to claim its Liberal political inheritance. The present study lends support to this assertion as will be seen in subsequent analysis, though it is important to establish at this juncture that the 1918 general election did not entirely decimate the Liberal Party. Douglas makes the simple (though effective) point that there were still very many people across the

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[69] *Oldham Chronicle*, 4th January 1919.
[70] P. Clarke, *Lancashire*, p. 395.
[71] D. Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 416.

country who still considered themselves to be Liberals and who 'had not even begun to think of transferring their allegiance elsewhere'.[72] Furthermore, the Labour Party performed badly in 1918; its parliamentary position had only marginally improved and despite a vast increase in the number of candidates its representation changed little, remaining overwhelmingly trade unionist (the ILP had performed extremely badly in 1918 for obvious reasons).[73] In Manchester, the local Labour Party bemoaned that the working-classes had 'failed to be radicalised by the experience of war'.[74] The 1918 general election witnessed no immediate transfer of allegiance from Liberalism to Labour in Manchester or across the country as a whole. It might have appeared like any other Khaki election, albeit one in which one of the participants had entered particularly divided and the results had been especially bad.

4.2: The Rusholme By-Election, September 1919

In September 1919 voters in Manchester were given an opportunity to express their opinion of the Coalition Government when the Rusholme seat became vacant following the death of its sitting Conservative member. The by-election was immediately perceived to represent a key test of public opinion towards the Lloyd George administration and its record over the past nine months. It would also provide an indicator of the respective positions of the two progressive parties. The Rusholme Liberal Association indicated that they intended to contest the seat claiming that the former constituency of South Manchester had always been a Liberal seat and their claim to stand was infinitely greater than that of the Labour Party's. Before the campaign had formally begun the Liberal press adopted a firm stance against Labour intervention. The *Manchester Guardian's* position was that at a number of recent by-elections Labour candidates had been 'ungrudgingly' assisted by the Liberal Party and so on this occasion Labour ought to demonstrate the same 'cordial co-operation and not force a triangular contest'.[75] In any case, the *Manchester Guardian* contended, forcing a three-cornered contest would only serve to strengthen the Coalition since it would simply 'gift' the seat to the Conservatives and thus strengthen the Government's present 'misguided policies'.[76] The newspaper suggested that there ought to be an

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[72] R. Douglas, *History of the Liberal Party*, p. 131.
[73] G. D. H. Cole, *History of the Labour Party*, p. 84.
[74] See *Manchester Labour Party Annual Report*, 1918.
[75] *Manchester Guardian*, 6th September 1919.
[76] Ibid.

'agreement on a reasonable allocation of seats based on the character of each constituency' [77] and in such an allocation Rusholme would be viewed as a Liberal seat. The actions of Labour on this occasion, it was believed, could be taken as an 'index of its sincerity', i.e. it would indicate whether the Labour Party placed the present dangers of the country before or after party considerations.[78] It became clear, however, that the Labour Party was resolute in its bid to contest Rusholme although interestingly Labour had intimated that a Liberal candidate would only be supported if that person disassociated himself from Asquith.[79] This was unlikely to happen and Labour formally declared that the party had adopted a candidate.

Robert Dunstan was emblematic of a new breed of Labour candidates who emerged after 1918. A doctor and qualified barrister, he represented the intellectual side of his party; he had not come via the unions [80] and in fact had only recently converted to the ILP having previously been a Liberal parliamentary candidate. In 1918 Dunstan had contested a seat in Birmingham for Labour but had been unsuccessful. During the war he had been a Lieutenant in the Royal Army Medical Corps and it was at this time that he converted to the Labour Party. Throughout the by-election campaign he intimated that if he was returned he would not give up his medical career claiming that the 'great emancipation which [was] to come would not come from professional politicians'.[81] Dunstan had no connections with Manchester and it was reported that some within the local movement were reluctant to support him since they favoured a local candidate.[82] The *Manchester Guardian* reported how endorsement from the central party was unusually slow; suggesting that opposition to his candidature was not purely local. The central executive of the Labour Party did give Dunstan full support however, and the leadership threw their weight behind him throughout the campaign.

After his controversial adoption Dunstan declared how he had been aware that the Liberals already had a candidate in place but he contended that his intervention was justified on the grounds that there would be issues upon which he and his Liberal

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[77] *Manchester* Guardian, 6th September 1919.
[78] See ibid.
[79] See *Manchester Guardian*, 9th September, 1919. This suggests that the Labour Party may not have stood a candidate if an 'acceptable' Liberal was put forward though this appears hard to believe.
[80] Dunstan was, however, a member of the National Union of General Workers.
[81] *Manchester Guardian*, 12th September 1919.

opponent would disagree and, additionally, it was essential that the Labour Party 'establish a strong parliamentary position... if it was going to realise its aim of seeing a Labour government come into existence' at this critical juncture.[83]

The Liberal candidate also came from the radical wing of his party. Like many radical Liberals during this period, W. M. Pringle had studied at Glasgow University. A barrister, he had been MP for North-West Lanark between January 1910 and December 1918.[84] Pringle had a reputation as being fiercely independent and had been vocal on a number of issues during the war. He had made a strong impression on the Manchester Liberals during the NLF meeting the previous year when he delivered a speech condemning the Coalition Government. At forty-five, he was still young yet he came with a wealth of political experience.[85]

The Rusholme By-Election Campaign

The Rusholme by-election began officially on 11th September 1919 yet it did so without a Conservative or Coalition candidate in the field and neither did it appear that the Conservatives were in any particular hurry to adopt one; as the *Manchester Guardian* suggested, they might have been content simply to watch the 'opening blows of the battle delivered between the two candidates already declared'.[86] It was more likely, however, that the local Conservatives experienced difficulties in securing a suitable candidate. A number of Manchester's most prominent Conservatives had allegedly been approached but had declined.[87] Eventually, the Conservatives secured Captain John Thorpe, a barrister also who served during the war and had been mentioned in despatches.[88] Unlike either the Liberal or Labour candidates, Thorpe had no political credentials whatsoever. Inevitably this prompted the local Liberal press to suggest that his candidature served to illustrate that the Conservatives had failed utterly in the 'quest for an influential Manchester man' although it seemed to escape the notice of the

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[82] See *Manchester Guardian*, 10th September 1919.
[83] See *Manchester Guardian*, 10th September 1919.
[84] M. Stenton and S. Lees, *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament*, Volume 2, p. 288.
[85] Pringle had fought four previous general election campaigns and had played a key role in the establishment of the Federation of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors.
[86] *Manchester Guardian*, 12th September 1919.
[87] These included E. F. Stockton (President of the Chamber of Commerce), Sir Percy Woodhouse (Chairman of the Manchester Conservative Association and the city's current Lord Mayor, Alderman Kay).
[88] M. Stenton and S. Lees, *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament*, Volume 3, 1919-1945, pp. 356.

Manchester Guardian that neither the Liberal Party nor Labour had secured an influential *Manchester* man. Unusually for the city, therefore, the Rusholme by-election was contested by three candidates all unknown as local politicians although it was likely this by-election in particular would focus more on contemporary national issues than might usually be the case than on the local status of the individual candidates.

From the beginning of the by-election the Liberal candidate made no attempt to hide his radicalism. Pringle's principal policy was that of a capital levy which he claimed was the only workable means by which to tackle the current economic crisis. Alongside the capital levy he ferociously condemned Britain's campaign in Russia, the deteriorating situation in Ireland and advocated the immediate nationalisation of all key industries and the complete abolition of conscription.

Pringle's basic argument with regards to a capital levy was that rather than relying on Germany to pay reparations 'the people of Britain would have to meet their own financial liabilities'[89] and he highlighted how expenditure exceeded revenue by more than £2 million every day and, although some savings might be obtained from greater economy in Whitehall, more had to be done. Pringle argued that the solution did not lie in the shape of Chamberlain's proposals (which was just a continuation of a policy of borrowing) but in something completely different, a levy on capital. He admitted such a policy might cause 'inconvenience in an immediate sense' but it was the best means of dealing with the financial crisis in the long-term. At this time some Liberals were anxious to present themselves as pioneers of the Capital Levy but the extent of support across the whole of the party was unclear. In Manchester there were clearly differences of opinion in relation to the policy. During the by-election the Chairman of the MLF, Arthur Haworth, was at odds with the candidate over the issue arguing that such a proposal was 'unsound even if practical'.[90] In response, Pringle suggested that the policy was an essential part of the MLF programme which had been drawn up by a representative meeting of all the city's Associations by an overwhelming majority; the policy had been adopted in other parts of the country and he refused to remove it from

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[89] For Pringle's position on the capital levy see, *Manchester Guardian*, 12th September 1919 and 25th September 1919.
[90] *Manchester Guardian*, 26th September 1919.

his campaign whether Haworth liked it or not.

Pringle adopted an equally radical line in relation to the Irish question, claiming that the people there were 'held down by military rule [and] their allegiance maintained and order preserved by 70,000 troops'. [91] Dominion status as incorporated in the Government of Ireland Act was probably the best workable solution but in relation to Ulster, allegiance could be determined on a county by county basis. Pringle vigorously supported the nationalisation of all key industries claiming that nationalisation was 'the only safeguard for the community' [92] as was the taxation of land values. In one powerful speech he drew voters' attention to the government's failure to fulfil the promises of the previous year: in nine months, he declared, peace had not been made (there were still twenty three ongoing wars), the Kaiser remained untried, the promised indemnity had not materialised, conscription had been prolonged, the daily expenditure exceeded the daily revenue by a catastrophic amount, trade remained hampered by restrictions, the country was sinking into bankruptcy, industry was unsettled and Ireland was sinking into deeper anarchy.[93] In his last election address Pringle delivered another very powerful speech focusing on the government's policy in Russia. Apart from the obvious sacrifice of British soldiers, he argued that intervention in Russia represented a complete waste of money: it had cost over £100million to date.[94] He also accused the government of lying about casualties, stating that more British troops had been killed in Russia than had ever been officially admitted and that the Secretary of State for War had lied to the House of Commons in claiming men who went to Russia had gone there (overwhelmingly) as volunteers. Pringle argued that a more accurate figure was around 10% and that the rest had gone against their will. Ultimately, he argued, 'the government had no right to put the life of a single British soldier in peril except where the interests of the country were at stake' and that was not the case in Russia. Throughout the contest some of the local Liberal rank and file appeared uncomfortable with Pringle's policy platform and it was even reported that some of his audiences had begun to ask him if he really was a Liberal; he maintained that he was a Liberal advocating a Liberal programme.

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[91] Ibid.
[92] See *Manchester Guardian*, 17th and 20th September 1919.
[93] See *Manchester Guardian*, 22nd September 1919.
[94] See *Manchester Guardian*, 7th October 1919.

Robert Dunstan was as radical a candidate for the Labour Party as Pringle was for the Liberals. From the beginning of the campaign, he declared that he was not fighting Rusholme for 'purposes of propaganda' and like his opponent focused principally on the Coalition Government's foreign policy, particularly in Russia. He appealed for an immediate end to hostilities and resumption of trade with Russia telling voters that if that issue was resolved others would follow: conscription would come to an end, the country would not need to maintain armaments and the economic crisis would begin to ease. He was a strong supporter of Free Trade and an even greater advocate of land taxation.[95] Like his Liberal opponent, Dunstan also spoke strongly for the necessity of a capital levy. He also paid considerable attention to the issue of profiteering claiming that this was just one aspect of an 'embedded corruption in political life'; only the Labour Party, he suggested, 'had no profiteers, no secret funds and no rich men'.[96] In relation to the housing situation he argued there should be a national system and public funds ought not to be placed in the hands of private landlords. Throughout the campaign Dunstan made explicit attacks upon the Liberal Party and argued that his opponent was 'dressing himself up in Labour garments' and it was only in response to public pressure (and expediency) that he had adopted such a programme. Dunstan stated how he believed both established parties had been discredited during and after the war but the Liberal Party in particular had had its day; he told voters how (like many others) he had left the Liberal Party because he had been 'disgusted at the conduct of Liberal Ministers in relation to secret foreign policy'.[97] He acknowledged that it appeared men such as Pringle were indeed creating 'a new programme and a new party' but that in itself was 'recognition that the Liberalism of the past had failed [and that] the Liberal Party in its despair [was] trying to cover up its past by adopting Labour's programme'.[98] Why then (he asked) did men such as his opponent not join the Labour Party? Of course, for many Liberals it was Labour who had, in fact, stolen their clothes. Given that Pringle and Dunstan had adopted virtually identical positions on foreign policy, conscription, land taxation, nationalisation and (crucially) a proposed capital levy, progressively minded voters would only be able to make a decision based upon

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[95] He suggested that taxation from land values ought to be pledged for the maintenance of disabled soldiers and their dependents; Dunstan placed considerable emphasis on justice for ex-servicemen throughout the campaign, see *Manchester Guardian* 25th September 1919.
[96] *Manchester Guardian*, 25th September 1919.
[97] *Manchester Guardian*, 12th September 1919.
[98] See *Manchester Guardian*, 20th September 1919.

which party was best placed to bring about such change.

The Conservative candidate advocated few concrete policies, simply focusing his campaign on the contention that the Coalition comprised the 'best men in politics' and ought to be given time to make good the promises of 1918 alongside a more general argument that if nationalisation were to be implemented it would lead to certain revolution. Thorpe asked voters to give Lloyd George the opportunity 'to show what he could do as a peace prime minister'[99] although he made it clear that he 'reserved the right to criticise the government as a Conservative and Unionist'.[100] The *Manchester Guardian* was clearly infuriated by what it perceived to be a 'vagueness and complacency' of the Conservative campaign. Indeed, Thorpe's campaign appeared to lack focus until the intervention of a railway strike provided it with some.[101] Although he condemned Britain's overseas obligations and sought a resolution to the problems in Ireland he ignored issues such as Free Trade, a League of Nations and industrial organisation altogether. As the campaign progressed, Thorpe seems to have resorted to personal attacks on his opponents, particularly upon the Liberal candidate; he told one meeting 'when Pringle [was] fighting in London for a review of the Exceptions Act most other men of military age were fighting in the trenches'.[102] Thorpe attacked the proposal of a capital levy as a confiscation which would 'empty the purses of those who [had] a few war savings certificates' although he avoided becoming too embroiled in the issue.[103] The traditional Manchester issue of Free-Trade v. Protection hardly appeared at all as a significant issue for the main party candidates. Interestingly, Pringle did not mention it in any of his election speeches.

The 1919 railway workers strike happened suddenly during the last week of the by-election campaign, and took all the candidates by surprise. The attitude of the candidates on the strike varied and it almost certainly made some impact on the performance of the parties at this by-election although perhaps not as great as some were subsequently to claim. The occurrence of a national strike in the later stages

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[99] See *Manchester Guardian*, 19th September 1919.
[100] Ibid.
[101] *Manchester Guardian*, 22nd September 1919.
[102] *Manchester Guardian*, 7th October 1919. To be fair to Thorpe he was pushed by the questioner on this occasion, yet, nonetheless, such sentiments probably had their effect all the same.
[103] See *Manchester Guardian*, 29th September 1919.

undoubtedly aided Thorpe's ailing campaign and the electioneering value of a national railway stoppage inevitably allowed Thorpe to make an appeal for public support for the government at a time of 'national emergency'; he portrayed the strike as an organised attack on the constitution declaring that 'forces of unrest must be dealt with severely'. [104] In relation to the Labour Party the *Manchester Guardian* believed there emerged an 'appreciation of the part played by organised Labour in the negotiations' so this only served to make the anarchist cries of the Conservatives appear ridiculous. This benefited the Labour candidate in the election; Pringle stated he was in favour of a standardisation of wages across the whole industry and against a return to the low wages of the pre-war years but beyond this he was accused of appearing somewhat impartial and slightly noncommittal in his attitude. This seems a little unfair however, since examination of Pringle's statements on the subject suggest a considerable degree of sympathy with the cause of the railway workers; in one speech he described it 'intolerable' that railway workers had to supplement their 'miserable pittance by tips from the general public'. Perhaps suggesting that the strikers be prepared to end their action and negotiate while the government listen to their arguments[105] gave too great an impression of impartiality, however, such impressions may have been reinforced by Pringle's suggestion that 'only reactionaries and revolutionaries' wished the strike to continue and his contention that a strike in one of the great essential services was 'an act of war [because] it put the community under a form of blockade'.[106]

During 1919, by-election results across the country were showing 'every sign of instability of public opinion' (as the *Manchester Guardian* expressed), though ultimately the newspaper concluded that 'a public willing to wound might [however] be unwilling to slay'.[107] Nonetheless, by-election losses for the Coalition represented clear condemnation of the government's policies and by the autumn of 1919 results were becoming ever more sensational. Newspapers such as the *Manchester Guardian* believed these provided evidence that the electorate was 'throwing off the momentary

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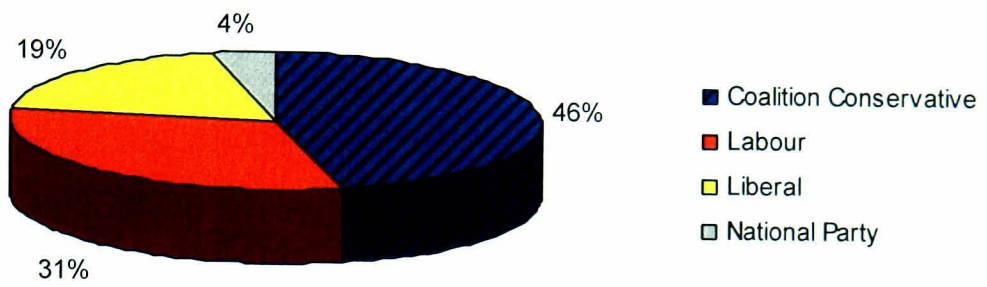
[104] See *Manchester Evening News*, 30th September 1919.
[105] Pringle argued that impartial tribunals ought to be used especially at such time as the present when industries remained under state control because it meant effectively that the Government was acting as 'judge in their own cases', *Manchester Guardian*, 30th September 1919.
[106] See *Manchester Guardian*, 30th September 1919.
[107] *Manchester Guardian*, 12th September 1919.

madness' of the previous year's general election.[108]

The 1919 Rusholme By-Election: Result and Analysis

Fig. 10 (Turnout 67.5%)



17.5% swing Coalition Conservative to Labour

The Rusholme by-election in September 1919 saw the Conservatives managing to hold the seat though with a substantially reduced majority; the party won with 45.7% of the vote, a majority of 14.5% over the second-placed Labour candidate (see fig. 10). The turnout was low for the post-war period and it is likely that some Liberal voters abstained.[109] The striking feature of the result was the advance made by the Labour Party, which had doubled its vote compared to the 1918 general election and managed to out-poll the Liberals by 12%. Given that Rusholme was traditionally Liberal territory (suburban and largely middle-class) this represented an astonishing result for Labour. This was an area of the city where Labour had no established organisation and no preparation had been undertaken before the contest. For the Liberals the result was disastrous. The Rusholme by-election proved a striking reminder that the Progressive Alliance in Manchester had been well and truly repudiated by the Labour Party and the result was unlikely to change their mind. Ironically though, it illustrated the necessity of progressive co-operation: the combined progressive vote amounted to just over 50%, 4.6% more than the winning Conservative. Had there been just one progressive

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[108] See *Manchester Guardian*, 13th September 1919.

[109] The turnout at the by-election was 67.5% compared to 62.9% in 1918 (the constituency had the highest turnout of any Manchester seat at that election). The 1919 by-election represented a low turnout when compared to most post-war contests (in the 1922 general election it increased by 10%).

candidate the Conservative would not have been returned.

The impact of the railway strike no doubt strengthened the Conservative vote considerably although there were a number of other factors which might have gone against Labour and the Liberals. As we have seen, whilst the Liberal candidate's radicalism was applauded by some, others evidently thought him a little too radical and there seemed some uncertainty in relation to how far the Liberals as a party went with him, especially concerning the capital levy.[110] It was believed that Pringle's (perceivably) impartial attitude towards the railway strike might also have weakened his campaign but as mentioned already this was slightly unfair as he had demonstrated considerable empathy for the railway workers; it might have been unfortunate for him to suggest the strikers consider negotiation. More importantly though, the strike diverted attention away from the issues which both the Liberal and Labour candidates believed would be decisive and upon which they had placed almost all of their attention, the capital levy, British intervention in Russia and the situation in Ireland. Furthermore, widely-publicised debate within the Liberals over Pringle's support of a capital levy was probably unhelpful. As the *Manchester Guardian* concluded 'the spectacle of not only members of the party... but of the president of the local organisation criticising the programme on which the party had invited the candidate to fight' created a disastrous impression. The Labour Party on the other hand demonstrated considerable party unity and no-one ever publicly questioned aspects of party policy or the policy as advocated by candidates in a parliamentary election.[111] Pringle believed that the election had taken place at a time of 'abnormal conditions' and he did not believe it demonstrated anything about the real balance of the parties in the constituency or in the wider country for that matter. He also suggested that the railway strike 'completely nullified the election as a test of public opinion on *political issues*' because many voters who would have voted against the government believed they should rally to the government during what they perceived to be a time of crisis.[112] At the same time, Pringle also suggested, a very large number of Liberal trade unionists believed the 'whole principle of trade unionism was at stake so felt obliged to support the Labour candidate'. Like Pringle, Dunstan believed that had it not been for the railway strike, Thorpe would not have won

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[110] *Manchester Guardian*, 21st October 1919.
[111] Ibid.
[112] See *Manchester Guardian*, 8th October 1919.

although he believed the result still represented a significant blow for the government because Labour had doubled its vote in what was a socially-mixed constituency. That meant that a sizable proportion of electors had supported the party's position on issues such as the capital levy, the taxation of land values, nationalisation and self-determination in Ireland as well as the Russian question.[113] Inevitably, Thorpe viewed his victory as a vote of confidence in the Coalition Government and he believed policies such as nationalisation and the capital levy had aided his position considerably.[114]

For the local Liberal press, the implications of the result were very clear: given that the Liberal and Labour candidates had virtually identical programmes there had 'probably never been an election in which the vote [of the two parties] could be more justly lumped together as the sum of progressive strength'.[115] For the Liberals the by-election served to illustrate the futility and consequences of three-cornered contests, and demonstrated the effects of an obsolete electoral system. The Liberals began to calculate that without electoral reform the position of their party was likely to remain difficult if not ultimately impossible in some places. For Labour, however, the result justified the decision to stand. Analysis of the Rusholme by-election demonstrates Labour's ambition and shows how far the party had come in terms of policy but it also highlights the continuing difficulties the Liberal Party faced. In a reversal of the pre-war political situation it now appeared that the Liberals were dependent upon the acquiescence of Labour.

4.3: The Clayton By-Election in Manchester (February 1922)

An early significance of the Clayton by-election in Manchester was that it signalled the prospect of a Liberal re-union in the city and although this did not occur at this stage the experience possibly ensured that an eventual re-union was likely. The Coalition Liberals' current position was difficult since organisation remained weak and Manchester's Conservatives appeared unwilling to surrender seats in their favour. Whilst there appeared a desire amongst Coalition Liberals to stand a candidate in the

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[113] See *Manchester Guardian*, 21st October 1919.
[114] See ibid.
[115] See *Manchester Guardian*, 21st October 1919.

by-election the organisation's headquarters were unwilling to sanction one and the by-election consequently saw a straight fight between the Conservatives and Labour. The Labour Party's candidate John Sutton had represented the Manchester East constituency from January 1910 but been unsuccessful in the newly constituted constituency of Clayton in 1918. From the beginning of the contest, Sutton fought a determined campaign focusing attention primarily on the failure of the Coalition Government to carry through the promises which it had made in 1918. His programme had a wide appeal and was likely to appeal to Liberal supporters in particular. More than any other issue Sutton appealed to voters on education, condemning the recent Fisher Education Act as a 'betrayal of the national interests' and promising to oppose 'any attempt to rob a child to pay for the war'.[116] In an interview with the *Manchester Guardian* he launched a particularly ferocious attack on the proposals of the Geddes Committee (published that day) declaring that it was an outrage that the Government was 'robbing the children of the war dead'.[117]

The publication of the Geddes Report came at an opportune time for the Labour Party and it possibly gave the party an enormous advantage.[118] Labour had strongly supported the need to protect education and pensions and the report was perceived to represent an attack on both. By citing the 'children of the war dead' Sutton no doubt struck a chord with many of the division's residents and his defence of education might also have appealed particularly to women. Given there were fifteen thousand female voters in the constituency it was unsurprising that he made strenuous efforts to appeal to them on these issues.[119] Another benefit under threat was pensions and, like education, Sutton stressed his fundamental opposition to any cuts.[120] Housing was also a concern as it had been suggested that houses built by the local authorities ought now to be sold off. Sutton argued that it was morally wrong to sell off public housing and that tenants, many of whom were ex-servicemen, could be evicted before replacements were built.[121] Inevitably the question of the current economic crisis, unemployment in

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[116] See *Manchester Guardian*, 3rd February 1922.
[117] *Manchester Guardian*, 4th February 1922.
[118] The Geddes Report proposed to exclude children under the age of six from school.
[119] As most candidates did after 1918 Sutton addressed a number of female only meetings where he dealt with aspects considered to especially affect them.
[120] The Geddes Committee proposed a 5 shilling (a week) reduction in pensions.
[121] *Manchester Guardian*, 14th February 1922.

particular, assumed a significant amount of attention during the by-election.[122] A manifesto in support of Sutton outlined how Britain was 'sinking beneath its burden of debt' while ministers were 'squandering money in support of frantic military adventures in support of reactionary policies abroad'. [123] Sutton used his final election speeches to argue that unemployment and a flawed foreign policy were intrinsically related. He told voters how unemployment was and would continue to be a problem that would overshadow all others and it was all 'down to the discreditable incompetence of the Coalition Government'. [124] There needed to be an immediate restoration of European trade (including Russia and Germany) and a restoration of Free Trade, which he stated was essential for the region given that the condition of industry in the region was 'determined by international relationships more than anywhere in the country'.[125] In contrast to the Coalition's flawed foreign policy the Labour Party, Sutton argued, advocated a policy of peace; interference in Russia and other countries had already cost £200 million. He suggested this could have built 200,000 new houses and he told voters the government 'had never been in earnest with their cry of building "homes fit for heroes to live in" and he argued that those who spoke of military pacts were 'traitors to the uncounted dead'. [126] Sutton defined his programme clearly and directly and successfully forced the campaign on to the record of the Coalition after the Armistice. He told voters that he simply wanted to 'do his best for those who had suffered by the war'. Interestingly, he chose to avoid the issue of nationalisation saying that it was 'not an immediate issue'.[127] A need to deal with critical issues such as unemployment, education, pensions, housing and the inadequacy of the peace treaties gave Labour momentum from the very beginning of the by-election and the publication of the Geddes Report perhaps reinforced Sutton's contention that the Coalition was 'unfit to govern'.

Essentially, economic, political and social context, a small number of issues, good organisation and the performance of the candidate himself ensured that the Labour

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[122] It was reported that unemployment levels in the division were high; 500 colliers had been out of work since the miner's lock-out and many others, especially in engineering, were either totally or partially unemployed, *Manchester Evening New*, 7th February 1922.
[123] *Manchester Guardian*, 13th February 1922.
[124] *Manchester Guardian*, 16th February 1922.
[125] See *Manchester Guardian*, 3rd February 1922.
[126] See *Manchester Guardian*, 16th February 1922.
[127] Ibid.

Party was likely to perform very well at the Clayton by-election. Sutton was very likely to secure the support of many Liberal supporters. He was a Free Trader, a strong advocate of the taxation of land values and a League of Nations. The only policy area where there might have been a difference of opinion with the Liberals (though not all of them) related to nationalisation although he mostly avoided that issue. The *Manchester Guardian* concluded that Labour's alternative amounted to 'not only a keen criticism of the Government but a forward policy' and that Sutton had effectively articulated a 'Liberal programme that was easy to support'.[128] The Liberal press possibly played a critical role in reassuring Liberal voters: throughout the contest the *Manchester Guardian* strongly urged its readers to vote for Sutton pointing out how the by-election presented a 'decisive opportunity to condemn the government'.[129]

Throughout the by-election, the Conservative candidate W. H. Flanagan never concealed the fact that he would only be willing to support the Coalition 'so long as his party continued to do so'.[130] As the campaign proceeded, however, his allegiance to his party began to appear tenuous and by the end of it he had started to sound more like an anti-government candidate. Tellingly, perhaps, he received no support from the Conservative Party leadership, having to rely on a few of Manchester's sitting MPs for support. Throughout the contest he played up his credentials as a local managing director and employer. In terms of economic policy Flanagan stressed a need for economy and an improvement in industrial relations. Co-operation between capital and labour formed the basis of his campaign yet he caused controversy when he appeared to suggest favouring the use of the military in industrial disputes.[131] The Liberal press reported that he had been a strong Protectionist up to 1920 but he was now claiming to be a Free Trader. In terms of foreign policy Flanagan initially took a very different position than his Labour opponent, declaring that he would 'wholeheartedly' support an alliance with France although he later modified this by saying he actually would wish little more than an entente. He believed Germany was attempting to evade her responsibilities but his position on this also changed as the campaign progressed; by polling day he appeared to be demanding a total revision of indemnities and even spoke

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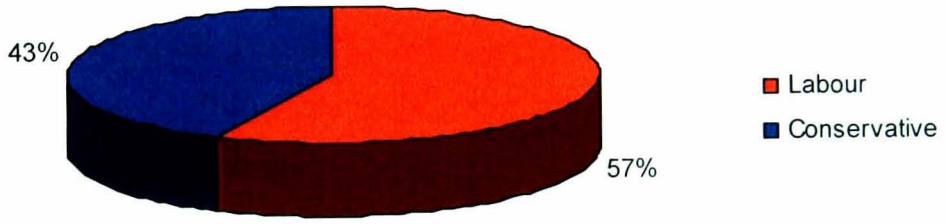
[128] *Manchester Guardian*, 18th February 1922.
[129] Ibid.
[130] See *Manchester Guardian*, 8th February 1922.
[131] Somewhat astonished, the *Manchester Guardian* claimed that this amounted to 'firing a shot over open sights into his working-class audience', see *Manchester Guardian*, 7th February 1922.

enthusiastically about the League of Nations.

Flanagan did not always cope well on the election platform and his speeches appeared abstract and vague. He failed to develop his points and regularly had difficulties in answering questions effectively. At one meeting, for example, he admitted to agreeing with an audience member's argument that the Coalition had failed to honour the promises made to servicemen in 1918.[132] He appeared to be the very antithesis of Sutton's polished, accessible and intelligent platform style. Some saw this as an endearing, albeit eccentric, aspect of his character but given the prevailing climate of hardship in the division it began to be perceived as rather inappropriate.[133]

The 1922 Clayton By-Election: Result and Analysis

Fig. 11 (Turnout 73.7%)



18.7% swing Conservative to Labour

The Clayton by-election resulted in a significant victory for the Labour Party. Sutton won the seat with a majority of just over 3,500, 14.2% of the total vote. At 74% the turnout was significantly higher than in 1918. Sutton claimed the result represented 'a blow against the Lloyd George Government and any candidate who had any lingering attachment to it' but it also suggested public approval of the policy of the Labour Party particularly on education. He also stated that he believed his advocacy of

[132] *Manchester Guardian*, 15th February 1922.
[133] The *Manchester Guardian* appeared to be completely perplexed by Flanagan and even went so far as to report that 'his mind [was] almost too remote for the common traffic of politics', see *Manchester Guardian* report, 10th February 1922.

'reconstructing Europe as the only way of reconstructing England' had been especially well received and he said electors now 'understood more fully how international affairs impacted upon them' than in 1918 and that there had been a pronounced anti-militarism amongst electors. [134] It is probable that Sutton had received a large proportion of the Liberal vote; the Liberals had urged supporters to get solidly behind Sutton and it had been easy on this occasion as Sutton had advocated a very 'Liberal' programme. He had avoided the issue of nationalisation focusing in particular on education and foreign policy and his platform talents shone in contrast to his inept opponent. For the Liberal press, the Clayton by-election appeared to demonstrate why unity was essential for the progressive parties; had there been a Liberal candidate the seat might have been lost and that would have been disastrous. The *Manchester Guardian* reiterated how it believed the 'future of Labour and Liberalism', as the by-election illustrated, was absolutely dependent upon some sort of 'accord'.[135] Yet the same newspaper recognised that difficulty lay with the local associations and while there was 'plenty of goodwill on the Liberal side [there was] a good deal less on the part of Labour'.[136]

Analysis of the Clayton by-election illustrates two important aspects of political change in Britain in the aftermath of the First World War. Evaluation of the election campaign demonstrates how the Labour Party came in to claim its 'Liberal' inheritance. As we have seen, John Sutton had articulated an exceptionally 'Liberal' programme focused principally upon the failures of the Coalition government: on issues such as education, housing, unemployment, pensions alongside foreign policy and as an individual he was a remarkably capable advocate of the Labour Party's (in his words) 'forward looking' programme. The impact of particular candidates (such as Sutton) and the sheer forcefulness of their campaigns were arguably of critical importance to changing political allegiance in the aftermath of the First World War. Whilst post-war socio-economic and political issues were increasingly national (as an emphasis on, for example, foreign policy illustrates), the way the respective candidates articulated their condemnation of the record of the Coalition and the way they advocated their own party's programme ought to be recognised as of being enormously significant. This suggests that in many ways the Labour Party created its own expansion, as Tanner

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[134] See *Manchester Guardian*, 20th February 1922.
[135] Ibid.
[136] *Manchester Guardian*, 20th February, 1922.

expressed, 'by learning to represent people's needs'.[137] The national political situation created a more favourable environment for Labour but the mobilisation of voter disillusionment into actual support for the party and, ultimately, firm political allegiance was achieved not least because of the ability of candidates such as John Sutton within the local context.

4.4: The 1922 General Election in Manchester

Political Context

Less than two weeks after the Carlton Club meeting the two sections of the Liberal Party in Manchester announced a complete reunion of the party in the city and on 2nd November the united party launched its general election campaign with a large demonstration in the Free Trade Hall. A number of points are important to recognise with regards to Liberal reunion in Manchester however. The Coalition Liberals never appeared to be as strong a force as in other parts of the country. In part, this was because the local Conservatives after 1918 had never been enthusiastic supporters of the Coalition. Some Conservative candidates in 1918 had chosen to refute the endorsement they had received from the Coalition; one Conservative candidate had run against and defeated a couponed Liberal in Hulme. Furthermore, for Manchester's Liberals there was, of course, that article of faith uniting them all: Free Trade. The return of a potentially Protectionist-inclined Conservative administration was a reason in itself to prompt the two sections of the party to overcome any differences.

Practically, Liberal reunion meant that Liberal activists who had been either officially or unofficially identified with Lloyd George simply returned to the local Liberal Associations. In terms of voters the *Manchester Guardian* estimated that around 75% of those Liberals who had given their allegiance to the Coalition would now be fully behind Liberal candidates in their constituencies although no estimate was made with regards to total numbers since this was presumably unknown.[138] Coalition Liberals who wished to remain a distinct entity faced considerable difficulties, not least in terms of organisation.

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[137] See D. Tanner, 'Class Voting and Radical Politics', p. 106.
[138] *Manchester Guardian* 3rd November 1922

From the beginning of the 1922 general election campaign the reunited Liberal Party in Manchester appeared optimistic that some of the ground lost four years earlier could be recaptured. Party workers suggested voters were supporting the Liberals because they 'did not know how far back the Conservatives would go and how far forward Labour may go'[139] and organisers were reportedly taken aback by the size of audiences who 'flocked to obscure schoolrooms' to hear the Liberal candidates speak. The Liberal press evidently felt that reunion had given the party a new lease of life in the city and predicted a Liberal resurgence.[140]

Whilst there was some variation between the Conservative candidates on fiscal policy none of them openly supported Tariff Reform and three even declared themselves as out-and-out Free Traders (in Exchange, Blackley and Platting). Unsurprisingly, the Liberal press viewed this as an election 'charade' and advised voters not to trust them.[141] The Conservative Party in Manchester was determined to sustain its current electoral position as it was across the country and this was reflected by the candidates the party had secured. In Exchange, Sir Edwin Stockton represented a local heavyweight. A well known cotton manufacturer, he had recently been President of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, was a Director of the Manchester Ship Canal, Governor of Manchester University and member of the Cotton Control Board. In Rusholme, Platting, Blackley and Moss Side the Conservatives were possibly basing their hopes on a split vote. In all of the constituencies the Conservatives attempted to secure former Coalition Liberal support, some more overtly than others. In Blackley, for instance, Harold Briggs defined himself as 'a Conservative of progressive thought' and appealed directly to National Liberals who believed in 'stability, economy and unity'.[142] The only Conservative not to court the National Liberal vote was T. Watts in Withington who reportedly went as far as putting up 'crude' and critical cartoons of the former prime minister'.[143] In the poorer parts of divisions such as Exchange and Hulme the Conservatives tended to focus on the familiar aspect of cheep beer and the local Liberal press inevitably condemned such tactics as crass and simply a ploy to 'catch votes' despite admitting that such appeals were likely to be effective in these areas.

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[139] Ibid, 2nd November 1922.
[140] *Manchester Guardian*, 4th November 1922.
[141] *Manchester Guardian*, 2nd November 1922.
[142] *Manchester City News*, 8th November 1922.
[143] *Manchester Evening News*, 9th November 1922.

As we have seen, after 1918 the Labour Party was not prepared to countenance any form of co-operation with their former Liberal allies although the Liberal press in Manchester believed this owed more to the party's national leadership than it reflected the overall attitude of the local constituency organisation.[144] Whether this was true or not, it certainly appeared too late for local agreements to be reached other than where the local Labour Party remained ill equipped to stand candidates. Admittedly, some Labour activists might have believed co-operation with the Liberal Party was useful for short-term development yet most determined it would severely disadvantage the movement in the longer-term. This is a critical point: after 1906 the Labour Party's priority had been short-term objectives; it was, after-all, a young organisation embarking upon its first tentative steps. After 1918 the situation was very different. Within this context, short term expedients such as entangling alliances with the Liberals did not equate with the party's aims and objectives.

The 1922 general election in Manchester saw four three-cornered contests, three straight fights between Labour and the Conservatives and three contests between Liberals and Conservatives. Labour (officially) stood in opposition to Liberals in three seats. The situation in Manchester might be taken to support the assertion that co-operation between the two left-of-centre parties had completely broken down and indeed it did not suggest a spirit of progressive harmony. However, there is another way to interpret the political situation in Manchester. Effectively, the Liberal Party was given a free run in three constituencies (Withington, Hulme and Exchange). These were all parts of the city where the Liberals might expect to perform well. It seems curious that Labour chose not to contest these seats in 1922. Likewise, the seats where Labour was given a free run against Conservatives were also in districts where that party had established a strong presence and would perceive to constitute its 'natural' territory (Clayton, Ardwick and Gorton). It seems that even though the Progressive Alliance had broken down at the national level, in Manchester there remained a sort of recognition that party interests remained best served if the left-of-centre parties were given a free run in their attempts to capture the anti-Conservative vote in districts identified as their 'natural territory'. The Liberals were cautious not to spin political fantasies around the concept of an alliance with Labour anymore and the Labour Party might have sought to

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[144] *Manchester Guardian*, 3rd November 1922.

reiterate its independence. The result was the same however: six of the city's ten seats saw no intra-left fight. In Manchester, the politics of the Progressive Alliance continued even if it was unconscious and unspoken; the parties continued to selectively target seats avoiding direct confrontation with each other as far as possible. The situation in the three constituencies where the Liberal and Labour parties did face each other was more complicated. Rusholme ought to have been considered a Liberal seat and the Liberals evidently viewed it this way; Platting was more of a Labour seat than it was ever likely to be considered Liberal.[145] Both parties might logically lay claim to Blackley. Examination of three-cornered contests in 1922 illustrates a great deal in relation to the positions adopted by the respective parties in terms of selectivity in contesting parliamentary constituencies.

Three-Cornered Contests

Rusholme had been won by the Conservatives at the by-election in 1919 largely, though not exclusively, on the basis of the national railway strike. In 1922, the Liberal Party opted for a more moderate candidate, E. F. M. Sutton, although the Labour candidate Albert Wood remained in the same radical vein as his predecessor. Like Dunstan at the by-election, Albert Wood was a successful barrister and was tremendously adept at articulating his points. From the outset he conducted a vigorous and intelligent campaign focusing more or less exclusively on unemployment and the late government's inability to tackle economic crisis effectively. His campaign slogan was 'peace, security and humanity' and he declared he wished to eradicate the 'ghost of insecurity' by creating a 'revolution in the minds [of the people] so they might see the justice of what the Labour Party advocated'.[146] Wood was highly critical of the former prime minister who he claimed was responsible for the 'present chaos' and he told voters that the forces of privilege and monopoly would unite again; throughout the campaign he stressed (what he called) the inequality of sacrifice made by the working-classes during the war and how that sacrifice now appeared to have been in vain.[147] Wood did not solely blame the government, however, so much as the wider community as a whole; in one powerful speech he told his audience how 'people's emotions were generous when they thought Belgium was being wiped out...but [they

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[145] Platting had never become a safe Labour seat. The strength of Conservatism remained high.
[146] See *Manchester Guardian*, 5th November 1922.
[147] Ibid.

were] slow to act now when eight million people were starving at home'.[148] In relation to the Capital Levy Wood claimed there was nothing confiscatory about it, asking voters to consider whether it would have been used if the war had necessitated it. He suggested that the present economic emergency and its attendant suffering did require it. In another highly emotive speech he declared how 'something radically different must occur if life is to be worth living'.[149] Altogether, Wood represented a powerful orator and remained focused on the one issue he had determined to fight the campaign upon, the Capital Levy.

Rusholme's sitting member, John Thorpe, had been a strong supporter of the Coalition and, in stark contrast to his opponents throughout the 1922 campaign, continued to reiterate his admiration for Lloyd George. In contrast to his by-election campaign three years earlier, Thorpe adopted an aggressive anti-Labour stance; he told one audience they should support 'anyone in order to defeat the Labour Party' which he said was 'the real enemy' of the nation.[150] He was ferociously hostile to the Capital Levy claiming such a policy would destroy the national wealth and the empire and represented the 'most fatal, unfair and unworkable proposition ever put forward in English political life'.[151] For good measure he added that were Labour to obtain power it would also mean the end of Christianity.[152] In relation to Free Trade he declared it to be simply a 'business proposition' and refused to outline his position any further.[153] The Conservative campaign in Rusholme was highly negative and understandably this antagonised the Liberal press. The *Manchester Guardian*, for example, described Thorpe as 'the most naïve of the candidates' and concluded 'politics to him [was] just a jolly game…a thing of high spirits and laughing assurances'.[154]

The Liberal candidate (E. F. M. Sutton) was also regarded as a particularly strong candidate. He was a well known local businessman and had been a member of the Manchester City Council for some time. Sutton focused attention on a wider range of

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[148] *Manchester Guardian*, 5th November 1922.
[149] *Manchester Guardian*, 7th November 1922.
[150] *Manchester City News*, 5th November 1922.
[151] *Manchester Guardian*, 8th November 1922.
[152] *Manchester Guardian*, 13th November 1922.
[153] The *Manchester Guardian* went so far as to write that Thorpe basically saw Free Trade as a 'dull affair for the theorists of the Chamber of Commerce', locally, the Liberals were evidently unimpressed with his stance on the subject.

issues than most of the other Liberal candidates in 1922 although he was inevitably forced to focus attention on fiscal policy, accusing the sitting member of 'not daring to stand on a Manchester platform and advocate Protection'.[155] Unusually for a Liberal candidate in 1922 Sutton went to considerable lengths to condemn the Capital Levy referring to it as 'a mad idea' which would inflict 'more harm on the working man than on the man it taxed because the economy would be affected so adversely'.[156] Sutton claimed a restoration of Free Trade and addressing reparations would alleviate problems such as the housing crisis and unemployment.

Another three-cornered contest which attracted a significant amount of attention during the 1922 election campaign was that of Platting where it was believed that the sitting member J. R. Clynes faced his most challenging contest to date. It was even believed that Clynes might lose his seat. Interest was no doubt heightened by the fact that for the first time since 1900 the seat was also being contested by the Liberal Party. Inevitably, Clynes focused most attention on the late government's record in respect of social reconstruction and the economic crisis.[157] He staunchly defended Labour's policy of the Capital Levy issuing an array of literature examining the proposal. Clynes told his constituents that 'those who had not £5,000 could breathe freedom... [it] was only intended to target excess'; the excess of fortunes made largely on the back of the war.[158] Clynes fiercely condemned the Coalition telling voters that the country 'did not have government but a callous desertion of it' and the people were 'entitled to more than just general talk about tranquillity.'[159] He believed his party faced considerable difficulties, however, because since Labour had grown in strength, their opponents were resorting to 'desperate attempts' to 'scare electors' by suggesting the party sought 'discontent'. This was erroneous, he claimed, because the Labour Party simply desired 'justice for those who did most to help the country during the war [but who were presently] treated the worst'.[160] Like all of the Labour candidates considered within the present study, a

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[154] *Manchester Guardian*, 13th November 1922.
[155] *Manchester Guardian*, 8th November 1922.
[156] *Manchester Evening News*, 8th November 1922.
[157] Similar to Labour candidates across the country, Clynes focused most attention on how the promises of the late government in respect to housing and treatment for ex-servicemen had not been kept; he told one meeting that 'those who had sacrificed and suffered for the war' had seen their position get worse. *Manchester Evening*, 7th November 1922.
[158] *Manchester Guardian*, 14th November 1922.
[159] See *Manchester Guardian*, 7th November 1922.
[160] Ibid.

feature of the 1922 election was how they strongly articulated inequality of sacrifice during the war and an abject inequality of the burden afterwards.

The Liberal candidate in Platting, W. Ramage, had been adopted a year earlier and had already undertaken a significant extent of constituency work. It was reported that he had canvassed in excess of over 25,000 of the 35,000 electors in the division and altogether approximately 50,000 election addresses had been circulated.[161] This suggests that the Liberal Association had already determined to make a very serious bid for the seat. Ramage chose to focus attention principally on the hardship endured by ex-servicemen. He told voters 'those crushed by the war should be the first charge upon the revenue'.[162] The Conservative candidate in Platting, Frank Hodge, promoted himself as a Free Trader and represented the moderate wing of his party. He argued the army should be kept at as low a force as conducive to national safety, opposed reductions in war pensions and spoke at length about the need to protect trade union powers.[163] Hodge repeatedly stated how he wished to see an end to 'class-war' and he emphatically avoided pursuing an aggressively anti-Labour position. Neither Hodge nor Ramage addressed the capital levy in detail.

The other three-cornered contest in Blackley saw the same three candidates as in 1918; all were well known in the area. In 1918 the Conservatives had won the seat with a majority of nearly 2,000 and it was generally believed that the sitting member, W. J. H. Briggs, had been a conscientious representative. Like Hodge in Platting, Briggs was a moderate Conservative who referred to himself as a 'progressive' Conservative and he focused attention primarily on ex-soldiers, pensions and unemployment. He avoided becoming embroiled in a debate over the Capital Levy despite the fact that his opponent had made it a central plank of his campaign. Labour's candidate, A. E. Towend, focused his campaign principally on the housing question and the Capital Levy. He argued that the housing crisis amounted to a 'betrayal of the people' telling voters this alone should 'leave them with no alternative but to vote for the Labour Party.'[164] Townend asserted there was no better alternative but to accept the proposed Capital

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[161] *Manchester Guardian*, 10th November 1922 and *The Times*, 2nd November 1922.
[162] See *Manchester Guardian*, 9th November 1922.
[163] See *Manchester City News*, 7th November 1922 and *Manchester Guardian*, 5th November 1922.
[164] See *Manchester Guardian*, 5th November 1922.

Levy if the necessary social reforms were to be financed; in response to what he called 'adverse press coverage' on the issue, he argued that if the country was ever going 'to get out of the morass of financial stagnation' it had to impose taxation on those who could still pay. Like most other Labour candidates in 1922 he related the issue specifically to an inequality of sacrifice during the war and a disproportionate burden at present.[165] More so than in other constituencies *both* Conservative and Labour candidates in Blackley focused the greater part of their campaigns on social policy and effectively there was little to distinguish between them. Neither Townend nor Briggs paid any attention at all to the fiscal question. The Liberal candidate P. Oliver, however, focused significant attention on Free Trade arguing that since Liberal representation in Lancashire remained low the region had practically been forgotten and Free Trade, so vital to the trade of the district, had been severely undermined.[166] Oliver asserted it was on the principle of Free Trade alone that voters should return Liberal candidates.[167] He did, however, address other aspects such as education, housing, medical services and pensions for ex-soldiers.[168]

Labour v Conservative Contests

Three of Manchester's constituencies saw straight fights between the Labour and Conservative Parties. In Clayton John Sutton told voters Bonar Law's policy of 'tranquility' meant 'sitting down in a comfortable chair, folding one's arms and doing nothing at all' whilst in the country 'the people were practically at starvation point' concluding that 'the country must not trust these people again'.[169] In a particularly powerful speech he argued that 'a working man who voted for an employer against a candidate selected by his own class was a traitor to his own cause'.[170] The opponent he had faced at the earlier by-election, W. H. Flanagan, proceeded in the same manner he had on that occasion: he had virtually no programme although this time he adopted a

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[165] See *Manchester Guardian*, 10th November 1922 for example. Townend offered a staunch defence of the Capital Levy primarily on the basis that the working-classes 'rallied to the country when their services were conscripted for the purposes of war' and so the least others could do now was assist in relieving the financial burden for those suffering incalculable suffering.
[166] *Manchester Guardian*, 8th November 1922.
[167] Ibid.
[168] He argued that economy was not the best policy, rather, educating the people was pointing out that whilst it cost £12.4s.4d per year to educate a child it cost £390 to educate a soldier at Sandhurst and he also argued economy could be effected by withdrawing from overseas expeditions such as Mesopotamia. See *Manchester Guardian*, 8th and 9th November 1922.
[169] See *Manchester Evening News*, 7th November 1922.
[170] *Manchester Guardian*, 9th November 1922.

more vigorous anti-Labour platform. In Gorton the former Minister of Pensions, John Hodge, faced determined opposition although he made a vigorous effort to fight for his seat. Unlike some of Manchester's other Labour candidates Hodge concentrated virtually exclusively upon the Capital Levy and, as he perceived, the injustices of the war. He asked electors why 'when manhood had been conscripted was capital allowed to escape'. [171] Hodge urged voters not to be misled by 'wild statements that Labour sought to destroy the country' because its intention was, in fact, to 'save it'.[172] Unsurprisingly, Hodge also devoted considerable attention to pensions and the treatment of former soldiers, their dependents and the families of those who had not come back. He stated that he would oppose any attempt to abolish the Pensions Ministry or cut down the pensions of ex-servicemen. Given that Hodge placed so much emphasis on the Capital Levy it was inevitable that his Conservative opponent, W. Heap, based his campaign primarily around a strong condemnation of it and he told one meeting that with the Capital Levy the Labour Party had been brought to 'the level of the Communist Party'.[173]

Liberal v Conservative Contests

The remaining three Manchester constituencies (Exchange, Hulme and Withington) saw straight Conservative v. Liberal contests. Manchester's most famous parliamentary constituency, Exchange (formally North-West) had a fluctuating electoral history and it was thought the 1922 general election here would be one of the closest across the city. The Conservatives had selected a local heavyweight as their candidate Sir Edwin Stockton, an extremely well-known local businessman though more crucially one of the Conservative's greatest advocates of Free Trade. The inevitable argument of the Liberals was, as always, that their candidate, Sir A. W. Barton would be a more effective Free Trader because the Conservatives would never be converted as a party to the principle of Free Trade.[174] The Liberals also attempted to make capital out of the fact that Stockton had been a member of the Protectionist Board of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce after the Free Traders had been ousted. Stockton responded that this merely demonstrated the Liberals were clutching at straws.

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[171] See *Manchester Evening News*, 9th November 1922.
[172] See *Manchester Evening News* 9th November 1922.
[173] See *Manchester City News*, 9th November 1922.
[174] *Manchester Guardian*, 5th November 1922.

The suburban constituency of Withington represented one of the Liberal Party's strongest hopes of regaining a foothold in the city's parliamentary representation. The electoral history of the area was strongly Liberal and the party's candidate in 1922, Ernest Simon, was a significant asset for the party here; he was one of the party's leading lights in Manchester and as outgoing Lord Mayor at the time had a strong public profile. Simon focused on the two key issues, housing and unemployment. He argued that the whole community 'must accept responsibility for ensuring every willing worker was given either work or proper maintenance and he stated that 'a larger policy was needed in respect of housing'[175] and he told voters all the Conservatives had declared on the issue was that 'they would see what they could do'.[176] The sitting Conservative member for Withington, R.A.D. Carter, who had been returned with a substantial majority in 1918 (69% of vote), had retired in 1922 so a new candidate, Dr. T. Watts, contested the seat. Watts appeared to have adopted a very simple appeal, much to the indignation of the Liberal press: cheap beer. Adding further insult to injury, he also declared himself to be a strong supporter of Free Trade.

According to the *Manchester Guardian,* Hulme was believed to be an unfertile territory for the Liberals, as it contended 'the man who goes there to preach an enlightened Liberalism needs a good deal of courage [because it was not easy] to turn the eyes of people of such a neighbourhood from the immediate prospect of cakes and ale'.[177] Beyond this however, even the *Manchester Guardian* was forced to concede that the sitting Conservative member, Major Joseph Nall, was one of the Conservative's most capable representatives in the city. Like Hodge and Briggs, Nall was on the left of his party and his campaign focused on an exceptionally wide range of issues. He spoke at length about the need to maintain ex-servicemen, the extension of the Rent Restrictions Act, maintenance for the unemployed and about issues such as education and housing.[178] Nall declared himself in favour of Imperial Preference although he did not dwell too much on this aspect. A notable feature of Nall's campaign was his evident distaste for what he termed the 'mud-slinging' style of politics which he said was 'submerging the real issues'. Throughout the 1922 general election campaign he clearly

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[175] See *Manchester Guardian*, 10th November 1922.
[176] Ibid.
[177] *Manchester Guardian*, 15th November 1922.
[178] See *Manchester Guardian*, 5th November 1922.

avoided anti-Labour sentiments.[179] Of course there was not a Labour candidate in Hulme but even so one might expect that the Conservatives might have attempted to make some capital out of a general anti-left feeling but the sitting member here simply chose not to. The Liberal candidate in Hulme, Walter Davies, was a well known local Liberal and treasurer of the MLF. His principal focus throughout the campaign was the failure of the Coalition Government primarily in respect of economic aspects such as Germany's ability to pay reparations at the current rate,[180] the decline in trade with Russia and the reduction in trade within the Lancashire district. Davies told voters his opponent's policy of Protection was itself largely responsible for the present scale of unemployment in the region; Nall himself avoided the issue so ultimately Davies was never able to divert attention onto it. An obvious problem for the Liberal Party here was that it was impossible to appear particularly socially progressive compared to the Conservatives because the sitting Conservative MP already was. It was impossible to portray the Conservatives here as unflinching or reactionary.

The 1922 general election saw the Liberal Party reunited in Manchester and outwardly at least the party appeared re-energised and expectations of a recovery were high but, as we have seen, the greater number of the Liberal candidates adopted conservative platforms and this contrasted greatly with the intensity of the Labour candidates' campaigns. On top of this, the Liberals remained beset with weak national leadership and the continued party split nationally.

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[179] Throughout the campaign Nall was highly critical of his Liberal opponent. In the main this was because Nall had taken great offence that the Liberal had told a meeting that his opponent had only been elected in 1918 because he was 'in Khaki with his arm in a sling'. see *Manchester Guardian* 9th November 1922.

[180] He said reparation debts ought to be written off.

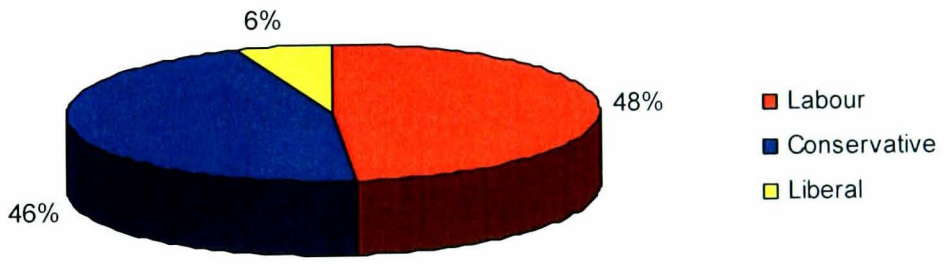
The 1922 General Election Results in Manchester: Results and Analysis

Three-Cornered Contests

Fig. 12 Rusholme (Turnout 77.8%)

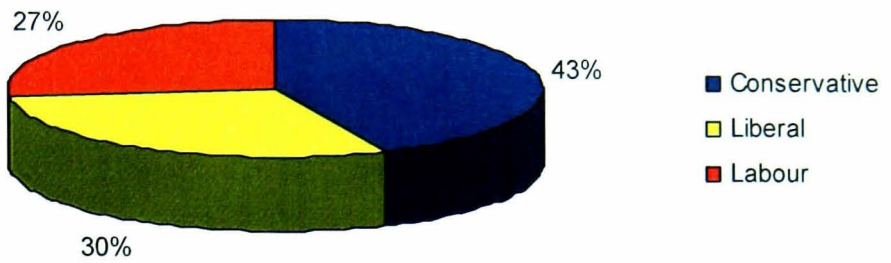
12% swing Coalition Conservative to Liberal

Fig. 13 Platting (Turnout 81.8%)



Seat unopposed in 1918

Fig. 14 Blackley (Turnout 81.4%)



5.65% swing Conservative to Liberal

Fig. 15 Moss Side (Turnout 70.4%)

9.95% swing Conservative to Liberal

Liberal v. Conservative Contests

Fig. 16 Withington (Turnout 77.4%)

17.8% swing Conservative to Liberal

Fig. 17 Hulme (Turnout 70.1%)

8.2% swing Conservative to Liberal

Fig. 18 Exchange (Turnout 61.2%)

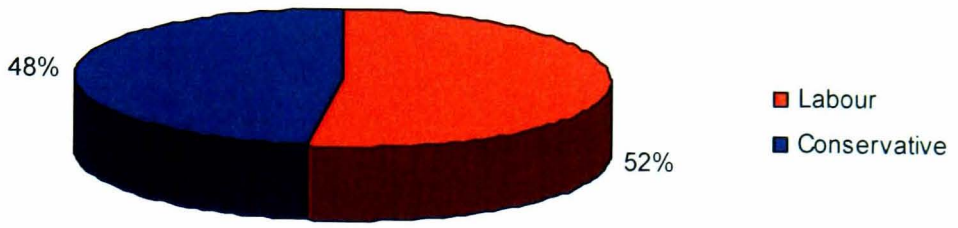
12% swing Coalition Conservative to Liberal

Labour v. Conservative Contests

Fig. 19 Clayton (Turnout 82.9%)

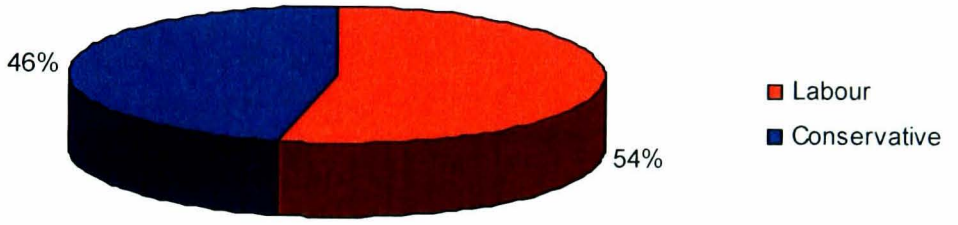
7.1% swing Labour to Conservative

Fig. 20 Ardwick (Turnout 71.4%)



10.65% swing Coalition Conservative to Labour

Fig. 21 Gorton (Turnout 79%)



17.15% swing Labour to Conservative

Analysis of the 1922 General Election Results in Manchester

The 1922 general election resulted in no resurgence for the Liberal Party in Manchester although close analysis of the results reveals that the Liberal Party had not been decimated. Evaluation of the Liberals performance in 1922 reveals a number of factors. In straight fights against the Conservatives the Liberals polled well; the party managed to obtain 49%, 43% and 42% in Withington, Hulme and Exchange respectively (see fig. 16, 17 and 18). Given the continuing difficulties the party faced at the national level, the Liberal's performance in these constituencies could be perceived as impressive although Exchange probably represented a great disappointment. In the three-cornered

contests the picture was more mixed. Whilst the Liberals managed to outpoll Labour in three of the four triangular fights, the margins between the two were extremely low (see figs. 12 and 14). In Moss Side where the margin was much greater (see fig. 15) this was against an unofficial Labour candidate who had had no organisation of any kind in the division. In Platting the Liberal poll at 6% was terrible (see fig. 13). The 1922 general election suggested that party support continued to be spatial but more significantly that where progressive co-operation broke down the results were disastrous. Although speculative, had the Liberals been allowed a free-run in Rusholme and Blackley the party would have been returning two MPs for Manchester and would have lost Moss Side by just a fraction (1%). The collapse of the Progressive Alliance meant that the political outlook for the Liberals in Manchester appeared uncertain yet it did not look altogether secure for the Labour Party either.

Nationally, the most significant feature of the 1922 general election was the advance made by the Labour Party. In Manchester, as this analysis illustrates, there was no Labour breakthrough, in fact the results were hugely disappointing for the party. From seven candidates across the Manchester constituencies Labour secured the return of just three including J. R. Clynes and John Hodge, both of these only just managing to hold on to their seats (see fig. 13 and 21). There was just one new seat captured (in Ardwick) although the party's overall position did not improve owing to the loss of Clayton (see fig. 20) which John Sutton had captured earlier in the year at the by-election. This represented a particularly bitter loss for Labour since the Conservatives slipped in on just 11 votes. Furthermore, of the four constituencies in which there were three-cornered contests, three, Blackley, Moss Side and Rusholme, (see figs. 14, 15 and 12), saw Labour placed below the Liberals. Although, as we have seen, the margins between the Liberals and Labour were low (3.1%, 0.1% and 9%) and given the complexion of these constituencies (two were virtually middle-class suburbia and the other was socially mixed) it could be contended that Labour had polled well. Yet overall, the 1922 general election saw the Labour Party in Manchester at a standstill. Whilst Ardwick had seen a swing of 10.65% from the Conservatives to Labour. Clayton and Gorton had seen swings *against* Labour of 7.1% and 17.15%. As will be

seen, this contrasted greatly with other parts of the country.[181] If anything, the 1922 general election served to demonstrate the necessity of progressive co-operation in Manchester yet this appeared to be an unlikely prospect given the Labour Party's new ambition and determination to fight elections as an independent force.

Parliamentary Elections 1918-1922: Conclusions

Tanner asserts that during the First World War the Liberal left had become both politically and ideologically weaker than it had ever been before; Liberalism was consequently thrown back to its traditional support base. Since Labour now appeared as a more practical alternative the New Liberal ideas which had made the party so successful before the war were effectively redundant.[182] Furthermore Lloyd George, who had provided the Liberal radicals of the pre-war era with a charisma and ability unsurpassed in British history, continued to remain outside the party. This made a bad situation considerably worse. Ultimately, as this study illustrates, despite some Liberal candidates articulating radical and progressive policy programmes, generally speaking the party's candidates could be perceived as virtually on the 'right' of politics or, at least, not essentially on the 'progressive left'. As is well established, many Liberal radicals (such as Outhwaite who will be discussed below) had concluded that after 1918 the Labour Party offered a more viable expression of the Liberal principles believed to have been ruthlessly abandoned by the Coalition Government.

Analysis of the parliamentary election campaigns between 1918 and 1922 in Manchester suggests that, apart from a few exceptions, Liberal candidates did not appear dynamic and progressive in the same way that their Labour counterparts did. Overwhelmingly, Liberal candidates fell back on the traditional, though by that time slightly dated, issue of Free Trade. The greater proportion of Liberal candidates in Manchester appeared to focus on Free Trade at the expense of virtually all other issues. On the occasions where progressive Liberal candidates did adopt a more dynamic and advanced programme they encountered (very public) resistance from within the local Liberal movement.[183] Manchester Liberalism was simply not as progressive as the

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[181] In the Hanley constituency of Stoke-on-Trent the swing to Labour was 10.9% (similar therefore to Ardwick in Manchester) although this was in the context of a previously high Labour poll in 1918.
[182] See D. Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 383 and pp. 377-380.
[183] It seems Liberal supporters were at variance as to what they wanted from their party. Whilst some seem to have been enthusiastic supporters of radical change, others it seems desired a more moderate

Manchester Guardian might have liked to believe it was, or at least it was not progressive when it most needed to be, within the context of the parliamentary elections.

4.5: Municipal politics in Manchester after 1918

As we have seen, the Labour Party's electoral progress in municipal politics in Manchester had been fragmented prior to 1914. After 1918, the political situation changed dramatically. As in many other areas of the country, the war had taken its toll on the Liberal organisation in Manchester and one might assume that this may have hindered the party's abilities to fight the first municipal contests after the war.[184] Prior to the 1919 elections the Manchester Progressive Union (hereafter MPU) had made an urgent appeal to its members for financial assistance and it was reported that the request had been met with a tremendous response. The new circumstances in 1919 still represented a challenge not least because the re-organisation of the ward boundaries necessitated the party organisations readjust to these. An indication of Labour's ambition was reflected in the number of candidates the party fielded in the 1919 municipal elections in Manchester for a total of 37 available seats: 19 (compared to 8 in 1913) while the Liberals and Conservatives stood 8 and 32 candidates respectively.[185]

The dominant issues of the 1919 municipal campaigns in Manchester were housing and the controversial subject of profiteering. As the *Manchester City News* commented, these were two issues which the city's councillors 'had chosen to avoid for so long but could avoid no longer'[186] and it was generally perceived that the Labour candidates in particular would gain most from the prominence of these two issues. Since Labour's position on the council had been peripheral before the outbreak of war, the party could

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platform. This, it could be suggested, represented a fundamental problem for post-war Liberalism; there was simply no uniformity of approach and this contrasted greatly with the unity of approach demonstrated by the Labour Party after 1918.

[184] The Manchester Liberal Federation attained a significant degree of financial stability. This had been achieved by increasing revenue alongside a more stringent allocation of funds to the associations. The MLF even managed to maintain its reserve account (a fund kept aside for emergencies), see *Manchester Liberal Federation Minutes*, 26th February 1919.

[185] Note that 7 candidates stood as 'progressives'. These have not been calculated into the Liberal total since it remains uncertain who most of these were. Examination of the records shows that only two (Walter Davies in Chorlton and E. F. M. Sutton in Rusholme) had in any way been connected to the Liberal Party in a significant capacity (both of who won).

[186] See *Manchester City News*, 1st November 1919; the *Manchester City News* was quite right in suggesting the city council had 'avoided' the issue; no investment had been directed to new building for years and four years of standstill during the war had made the situation critical.

therefore not be held accountable for previous failures to deal with such problems. Furthermore, as the council records show, these issues (most notably housing) had constituted a key plank of the Labour councillors' agenda before 1914. The Labour group had at least attempted to address these issues before the war and so could not be perceived as campaigning upon them at the present merely for reasons of political expediency.

The 1919 municipal contests in Manchester resulted in a significant advance for Labour: the party's candidates were returned in 11 seats taking its total representation on the council to 31. Conservatives were returned in 9 seats (their overall representation dropping from 55 to 38) and the Liberals were successful in 2 seats (from 5 candidates).[187] In an apparent spirit of progressive co-operation (or simply a reflection of the Liberal's inability to contest a greater numbers of seats) there were just 3 three-cornered contests in the 1919 municipal elections; Blackley and Moston saw the Labour Party outpoll the Liberals while in Levenshulme the Liberals outpolled Labour although the margins were small (see appendix figs. 171, 184 and 180). For the *Manchester City News*, Labour's large poll in the 1919 municipal elections suggested that the public 'was in sympathy with the party's aims' and 'dissatisfied with existing conditions' namely in relation to housing and social conditions.[188] The same newspaper also reflected that it was perhaps 'inevitable under the circumstances that Labour should pitch its strength against the parties which had been [up to that point] principally associated with local government'.[189] All the parties had campaigned on social reconstruction and one can only assume that in the working-class wards especially electors voted for the party they trusted most and blamed the least in relation to perceived past failures on such issues.

The critical question in 1920 was the extent to which the Labour Party would be able to hold onto gains made the previous year. Maintaining the momentum from the previous year the Labour Party fielded 21 candidates while the Liberals ran 13 (standing on a 'Liberal and MPU' label). The Conservatives stood 21 for the 29 available seats. The 1921 municipal elections saw a record number of contests in which the Liberal and

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[187] The remaining seats were won by independents, progressives and one co-operative.
[188] *Manchester City News*, 8th November 1919.
[189] Ibid.

Labour parties faced each other (9 in total) reflecting that at this level the Progressive Alliance had clearly come to an abrupt end. The results of the 1920 elections saw the Liberals and Conservatives return 7 and 13 candidates respectively. Relative to the number of seats contested, therefore, the Liberals performed exceptionally well. Admittedly, the Liberals had been successful in their traditional heartlands (All Saints', Cheetham, Moss Side West, Rusholme and Withington); nonetheless, the elections proved that the Liberal Party was not to be discounted as a municipal force. Labour on the other hand suffered a significant setback with the party managing to win in just 5 wards (Beswick, Gorton South, Miles Platting, Openshaw and St Michael's) and, as we have seen, these were all areas where the party already had a solid electoral base. More particularly, where the Labour Party was challenged by both Liberals and Conservatives it performed very badly. Of the 9 triangular contests, only 3 (Harpurhey, Moss Side East and St. Georges) saw Labour able to poll more than the Liberals (see appendix figs. 204, 209 and 217). Where Labour was challenged by only Conservative opposition (in 10 of the wards it stood) the party did slightly better, winning in 5 including areas such as Beswick, Openshaw and Miles Platting (see appendix figs. 195, 214 and 208)[190] although it performed very badly against Conservatives in areas such as Newton Heath, Longsight and Medlock Street (see appendix figs. 213, 206 and 207).[191]

1921 saw another large number of contests at the municipal elections (33 in total for the same number of seats). Just three candidates ran as Liberals while 9 stood as 'Progressives'. Some of the latter included well-known local Liberal activists (and existing council members) so effectively the total number of 'Liberals' may be seen to have totalled 12 (the same as the previous year). Labour and the Conservatives ran 16 and 29 candidates respectively. The contests resulted in the return of 22 Conservatives, 5 Labour, 4 Progressives and 2 independents. The Labour Party had performed well in the areas where it was already well established; Beswick, Bradford and Gorton South (see appendix figs. 224, 226 and 235) though did badly elsewhere (see appendix figs. 225 and 227 for example). In contrast to the previous year, the 1921 municipal elections

[190] Beswick and Openshaw were both 'better' working-class wards and highly unionised while Miles Platting was more mixed (including some slum areas).
[191] Newton Heath and Longsight were both mixed wards while Medlock Street contained significant slum areas.

saw just two contests where the Liberals and Labour faced each other; in a straight fight in Newton Heath and a triangular contest in St. Mark's; in the former the Liberal won with a large majority (see appendix fig. 245) and in the latter Labour was returned while the Liberals came bottom of the poll (see appendix fig. 253). The results were mixed for the Liberals; the party performed well in its suburban heartlands, Didsbury and Rusholme for example (see appendix figs. 232 and 247) but poorly in more mixed areas such as Crumpsall, Collyhurst and Longsight (see appendix figs. 231, 230 and 238). Exchange represented a particular disappointment for the Liberals where the party`s candidate polled 34% less than the winning Conservative (see appendix fig. 233).

Whilst the 1922 municipal elections were perceived to have greater significance because of the parliamentary contests, the occurrence of the general election meant that only a relatively small number of wards were contested, 23 in all. Despite increased pressure on the organisation because of the general election Labour was still able to run a large number of candidates in the municipal contests, 19 in total, just one less than the Conservatives. The Liberals, no longer using the label progressive, ran only 6 candidates and managed to return 2 (in Chorlton-cum-Hardy and Rusholme). Of the 3 wards where the Liberals and Labour faced each other, Collegiate Church saw the Liberals push Labour into third place, a split vote in Miles Platting allowed the Conservative to win and in Moston in a straight fight Labour won with a substantial majority (see appendix figs. 260, 265 and 268). Altogether, 10 of Labour's 19 candidates were returned which represented a great success yet the results left the party with a net loss on the council of 4. The overall position of the council consequently stood at 75 Conservative, 27 Liberal/Progressive, 25 Labour and 13 independents; the Conservative majority was roughly what it had been in 1920.

Council Politics in Manchester after 1918

The 1919 municipal elections represented a watershed in Labour's position within local government in England and, as we have seen, in Manchester. The party was now in a better position to have a significant impact upon municipal politics than it had ever been. Yet as Labour's position changed so too did the attitudes of the established parties. Prior to 1914, Labour's councillors had largely been moderate Lib-Lab types. This had begun to change but, generally speaking, few of the Labour Party's municipal

representatives were out-and-out socialists. Moreover, they were generally received positively by the established parties; there never existed what one might define as an anti-Labour agenda. After 1918 this changed dramatically. One of the key features of the immediate post-war period was how Labour's municipal representatives became more assertive and *political*; likewise, the attitude of the established parties, particularly the Conservatives, became noticeably hostile. Municipal politics after 1918 became increasingly politicised and this may have, in turn, had wider electoral implications. Although the following section focusing upon council politics in Manchester after 1919 is necessarily brief, it hopes to provide an insight into the impact a larger influx of Labour members had upon the Manchester City Council. A key question, of course, is how the new (larger) Labour group attempted to assert its influence in municipal policy formation and what (perceivably) the electoral implications of this were. It will consider Labour's role in the formation of municipal policy on the two critical issues of the period, unemployment and social welfare reform within the context of the 'municipal economy' debate.

A significant problem for the Labour Party before 1914 had been low representation on the council committees[192] and immediately after the 1919 contests the Labour group were anxious to address this issue. [193] They argued that the council ought 'to take cognisance of their new position and accept the Labour victories at the polls.'[194] The request, however, was ignored. The *Manchester Guardian* in particular became strongly supportive of the Labour Party's claims in relation to committee representation. In March 1920, for example, the newspaper bemoaned the fact that whilst Labour may have done very well at the polls, this 'could not guarantee the party an effective voice in the city's affairs which its numbers might warrant'.[195] The same report also claimed that it was widely known that the Conservatives within the council considered the Labour members as being of 'inferior status.' This was quite possibly the case although there also were some specific reasons underpinning objections to a strong Labour

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[192] Arguably, it was within the council committees that much of the critical work (and policy formation) took place.

[193] Cahill suggests that because of the committee system, even as a minority party, Labour was afforded a greater degree of influence in policy formation than its numbers justified, see M. Cahill, 'Labour in the Municipalities' in K. D. Brown, (ed), *The First Labour Party*, p. 97. In Manchester, however, even after 1919 Labour's representation on the council committees remained low and this continued to be an aspect of dissatisfaction for the party.

[194] *Manchester Guardian*, 4th December 1919.

presence on the committees, most notably the question of impartiality. This was illustrated by the Conservative Alderman Bowes when he argued that because 'of their politics they [were] debarred from performing certain governmental functions ...as trade unionists, they could not be expected to hold the balance evenly between the city and its workpeople where dealings with corporation employees were concerned'.[196] Yet clearly the attitude of the Conservatives *was* influenced by prejudice as much as anything else. *The Manchester Guardian* reflected this when it reported (at the same meeting) how 'almost every amendment emanating from the Labour benches was negated by a solid Conservative vote'.[197] Although Labour received the support of some Liberals this was rarely enough to ensure the adoption of Labour amendments or proposals.[198] Clearly, obtaining a sizable foothold in the municipal representation of the city was one thing, but being able to exercise influence in the decision making process thereafter was a different matter. Nonetheless, the Labour group *did* make its presence felt in the only way it could, within the context of the council's monthly meetings. Inevitably perhaps, the group focused its attention on aspects such as unemployment, housing and general issues of social welfare.

Analysis of policy on unemployment helps to shed light on party ideology and influence at the municipal level during the immediate post-war period. An early (though very striking) indication of mounting economic crisis in Manchester occurred in March 1919 when an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 unemployed men gathered outside the city's town hall in an attempt to alert the council to their plight and, of course, to request it consider possible assistance especially in the interests of demobilised ex-servicemen and munitions workers. [199] Securing a meeting with the Lord Mayor, one demonstrator (local Labour activist Annie Lee) described conditions in Openshaw as on the verge of disaster; hundreds were on the verge of pneumonia, she reported, because they could not afford to buy coal and she also highlighted how nearly 60,000 women across the city were unemployed. Another member of the deputation told the

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[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid.
[198] The Aldermanic bench was also influential in swinging the council against Labour resolutions on many occasions.
[199] It was estimated that about ten thousand of these were ex-servicemen, see *Manchester Guardian*, 6th March 1919.

Lord Mayor how, in his opinion, the city was 'on the verge of catastrophe'.[200] Within the council chamber, unsurprisingly, the issue received immediate attention in terms of discussion but only after the intervention of Labour members did it appear that more resolute action was to be undertaken. On the initiative of the Labour group's leader, Tom Fox, the City Council voted in favour of establishing a special committee to report on schemes of public utility to be put in place by the council's departments.[201] Furthermore, after protests by Labour's Councillor Davy it was agreed to pass a resolution to the government urging steps be taken to accelerate normal working conditions by the decontrolling of industry. Davy especially had been exceptional vocal on insisting there be no delay in the council's actions, as he argued 'these men were victims of the Great War and are entitled to be maintained'. [202]Unlike other areas such as Salford, Manchester had been slow in creating general schemes of relief work. On the recommendations of the special committee on unemployment from 1921 the council had begun a range of relief schemes employing over 2000 men and the Lord Mayor's Fund had raised over £11,000, from which £500 a week was estimated to provide for over 500 families.[203]

The question of 'municipal economy' had long been a feature of the politics of local government but with increasing economic uncertainty the issue attained an even greater significance after 1919. This presented difficulties for the municipal authorities since whilst much work needed to be undertaken in connection to social improvements (housing, education, child welfare, health, not to mention unemployment relief work), the question of 'economy' meant such schemes became increasingly controversial. Economy became the central focus of council politics after 1919 and it was extremely politically divisive. The parties were eager to present themselves as upholders of 'municipal economy' and, equally, anxious to label their opponents as 'wasters'. The electoral appeal of the economy 'cry' could be perceived as one which would inevitably disadvantage the Labour Party (given its focus on the absolute necessity of welfare improvements) yet examination of the municipal debates in Manchester reveals that this might not necessarily have been so straightforward. The Labour group was as

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[200] *Manchester Guardian*, 6th March 1919.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid.
[203] See *Manchester Guardian*, 22nd October 1921.

anxious as its opponents to use the 'economy cry' but from a very different perspective and, arguably, the anti-Labour-anti-waste strategy of some of the party's opponents may not have reaped the rewards expected.[204] As we will see below, on the many occasions when Manchester City Council's Labour members argued against the economy 'lobby' they did so by questioning the established notion of what 'economy' meant. In defending various welfare provisions, they argued that 'true economy' could only be effective with improved health, education and the general well being of the people (children in particular). This can be seen, although it was not necessarily articulated as such, as a national efficiency argument as much as by humanitarian concerns.

In Manchester, proposals to increase expenditure on various essential social provisions were regularly met with determined opposition from members of the council who deemed it an inopportune time to embark upon 'idealistic schemes'.[205] Inevitably, the progressives on the council objected strongly to cuts in social provision for the sake of so-called 'economy' arguing that, irrespective of the basic humanitarian grounds, poor health and education of the workers was, in any case, more expensive in the long-term than the expenditure invested in the present. Even the issue of child welfare proved divisive within the council chamber. In March 1921, for example, a proposed extension of child welfare centres across the city saw the Public Health Committee forced to abandon its attempts to substantially reduce costs after opposition from Labour and Liberal councillors.[206] In a heated debate the combined forces of the 'progressives' maintained that the centres were an essential part of the drive to reduce infant mortality which remained very high and they were well used and thus evidently useful. The following month's meeting was again dominated by the question of economy after the Chairman of the Finance Committee moved a motion that no new schemes (at all) be initiated or existing ones extended. Two Labour members, Alderman Jackson and Councillor Mellor, led opposition to the motion. Mellor suggested that if the Finance Committee 'needed new revenue it only needed to look to land values for the

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[204] It could be suggested that this is similar to the way anti-Labour propaganda in the form of Bolshevik accusations in 1922 back-fired.

[205] See speech opposing proposals to build houses by the Conservative councillor James Johnson, *Manchester Guardian*, 2nd July 1921.

answer'.[207] The meeting saw a particularly heated debate though ultimately the Labour-led opposition was successful by 49 to 33 votes, leading the *Manchester Guardian* to declare a 'significant victory for the council's progressive forces in relation to the "economy" debate'.[208]

Later in 1921 economy speeches became an even more dominant feature of the monthly council meetings particularly in the months preceding the November elections. The Labour Party appeared anxious to be seen as mindful of a need for economy though from a different perspective. Whilst Labour argued the council ought not to cut essential social services, there were areas where appropriate savings could be made they argued. In the September meeting, for example, the Labour group claimed, amongst other things, that some surveyors employed by the Housing Department were surplus to requirements and a drain on expenditure, the reservoir begun 14 years earlier in Heaton Park was increasingly expensive and the £60,000 a year the corporation spent on stationary could be dramatically cut.[209] At the following month's meeting a Conservative attempt to reduce expenditure on the provision of massage sessions for children with rickets was overcome by combined Labour and Liberal forces who argued 'expense should not stand in the way of a chance of a cure'.[210] Examination of the Manchester city Council records suggests that the economy versus child welfare debate was one those demanding 'economy' were unable to win though the key point remains that, more often than not, it was only after Labour led opposition to cuts that such plans were abandoned.

Another aspect which generated considerable debate was the question of official's pay and on a number of occasions the Labour group successfully led opposition to large increases in municipal salaries. In December 1921, for example, when the question of the newly appointed Town Clerk's salary came up for discussion it proved to be extremely divisive. Labour's Councillor Cundiff moved that the proposed salary be

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[206] The proposal not to proceed with extending the schemes was defeated by 67 to 25 votes and in a highly unusual move the *Manchester Guardian* published the names of the 'Conservative irreconcilables' who had voted against the schemes, see *Manchester Guardian*, 3rd March 1921.
[207] *Manchester Guardian*, 7th April 1921.
[208] *Manchester Guardian*, 7th April 1921.
[209] See *Manchester Guardian*, 6th September 1921.
[210] See speech by (Liberal) Councillor Charles Godbert speaking in support of maintaining the sessions in *Manchester Guardian*, 6th October 1921.

reduced by £250 claiming that electors' at the municipal elections had 'expressed their feelings on the subject of economy'. The three parties remained split, however; some asked what difference £250 would make while others believed to contemplate paying a lower salary to its Town Clerk than other municipalities would be terribly embarrassing for Manchester. Cundiff stood his ground however, arguing that it was 'a question of setting an example... at a time when there existed so much hardship it was inappropriate to be handing out enormous salaries to officials'.[211] A compromise was finally reached when the new Town Clerk himself offered to accept the reduction. Whether this would have been the case without Labour's objections remains an open question, but the episode, again, illustrates how the Labour members were anxious to demonstrate concern for what they perceived to be unnecessary municipal expenditure. A year later, the city's chief water engineer was also denied a salary increase after a resolution moved by Labour Councillor Hague. Despite objections on the grounds that this particular official had saved the corporation £200,000 by overcoming technical difficulties and the fact that other corporations paid their engineers much more, the council supported Sutton's argument (by 54 to 51 votes) that 'whilst [there were] hundreds of schoolchildren to feed and thousands of men starving [it was] not playing the game to advance already large salaries'.[212] Interestingly, it was noted by the press that on this occasion a number of Conservatives had voted with the Labour group (and Liberals).

This analysis includes just a small sample of the many examples one finds in the municipal proceedings and how the enlarged Labour group contributed to the council's debates and subsequent policy in Manchester. It illustrates that after 1919 the Labour group had clearly grown in confidence and become a dynamic force on the city council despite persistent difficulties such as low committee representation and sizable opposition to its position on many aspects. The electoral significance of this can only be speculative although it is possible to suggest that, for some voters at least, Labour's practical contribution to safeguarding certain social provisions and active role in policy on aspects such as unemployment may have served to consolidate their allegiance to the party. Furthermore, in wards where Liberal supporters no longer had the choice of a Liberal candidate, the fact that the Labour group on the council was reformist and

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[211] See *Manchester Guardian*, 3rd December 1921.

progressive may have underpinned their support. Analysis of the council records in Manchester suggests that there existed a considerable extent of progressive co-operation and there appears to have been little in the way of a significant anti-Labour cleavage within the council. Additionally, neither does analysis of the municipal elections after 1919 demonstrate the emergence of a formal alliance between the Liberals and Conservatives.

4.6: Political Change in Manchester 1918-1922: Conclusions

As in many other areas across the country, the First World War had a significant impact on the Liberal Party in Manchester. The party lost all of its parliamentary representation in the city in the 1918 general election and saw its share of the vote plummet. Despite this, it would be unwise to determine that the Liberals in Manchester had been entirely decimated by the experience of war. Furthermore, as this study shows, there was no immediate transference of allegiance from the Liberals to Labour. In two of the three triangular contests in 1918 the Liberals were able to outpoll Labour opponents. In Manchester, as indeed nationally, Labour's performance in the 1918 general election was disappointing; the party's position had barely improved at all. But, of course, the 'coupon' election had been conducted amidst highly unusual, even chaotic circumstances and the extent to which the results in fact reflected actual party support was questionable. Subsequent elections would prove more illustrative.

Some historians have suggested that during the early 1920s the Labour Party did best where it was more concerned with practical working class interests as opposed to industrial struggle.[213] Detailed analysis of the two by-elections and the 1922 general election in Manchester shows how Labour candidates after 1918 focused their attention on questions such as greater justice in relation to the burden of war, education and housing alongside policy on unemployment and industrial organisation. In many respects, Labour's policy programme from 1918 reflected traditional Liberal concerns. Tanner has suggested that these were 'moral issues [which] built upon pre-war campaigns for economic justice'.[214] Examination of post-war electoral politics in Manchester lends support to this assertion; the Labour candidates' impassioned

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[212] Ibid.
[213] See, for example, M. Savage, *Dynamics*, pp. 194-199.
[214] D. Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 351.

advocacy of (concrete) proposals such as a capital levy and education, housing and unemployment, may have ensured a growing proportion of electors perceived Labour (as opposed to the Liberals) as representing the best medium for reform. As this study shows, the impact of particular candidates, their campaigns and party organisation were all critical to electoral realignment in the post-war period. Candidates such as John Sutton in 1922 fought determined campaigns and proved to be capable advocates on policy. The overriding sentiment for them was that the war ought not to have been fought in vain and as the Clayton by-election result demonstrated, the result was that it contributed to propelling Labour forward as the principle party of the industrial working-classes.

Nationally, the most significant feature of the 1922 general election was the advance made by the Labour Party. Manchester, however, saw no such breakthrough; in fact the results were hugely disappointing. From seven candidates across the ten Manchester constituencies, Labour secured the return of just three; two of these saw the sitting MPs Clynes and Hodge only just managing to retain their seats. Just one new seat was captured although the Labour Party's overall representation did not change owing to the loss of another. Furthermore, of the four constituencies in which there were three-cornered contests, three saw the Labour Party placed below the Liberals. The 1922 general election saw the Labour Party in Manchester at a standstill. On the other hand, the re-united Liberal Party in Manchester had a renewed sense of confidence and optimism. This did not manifest in electoral success however, although given that the party remained lumbered with weak national leadership and continued division, the Liberals performed well in Manchester. Future prospects remained uncertain, not least because strategic co-operation with Labour was clearly no longer a possibility.

Chapter 5: Electoral Re-alignment in Stoke-on-Trent, 1918-1922

5.1: The 1918 General Election in Stoke-on-Trent

Political Context

Studies such as those by McKibbin, Tanner and Petter have all provided some assessment of Stoke-on-Trent although this has focused on the period prior to 1914, largely due to the national significance of the 1912 by-election because of the implications this had for national politics.[1] No study has examined constituency politics in the area after the First World War. Analysis of political change in Stoke-on-Trent after 1918, however, provides a valuable insight into political re-alignment after the upheaval of war. As we have seen, before 1914, industrial North Staffordshire was an area deeply impregnated with popular working-class Liberalism and there appeared little prospect of an imminent Labour breakthrough. The 1918 general election, however, saw a significant advance for Labour in the area and this was consolidated in 1922 by which time the party held two of the three parliamentary seats (the other being held by an independent Labour member). The Liberal Party, on the other hand, had suffered an astonishing reversal in political fortune.

At the national level the immediate post-war period saw Labour became a more serious political force whilst the Liberals became a seriously diminished opposition. The Progressive Alliance collapsed completely and in some areas Liberal unity disappeared. We should be cautious though not to exaggerate Labour's immediate post-war advance. In many areas there was no immediate transfer of support from Liberal to Labour; political realignment was, uneven, fragmented and subject to regional variation. Analysis of Manchester illustrates that the 1918 general election did not produce an electoral breakthrough for the Labour Party and neither had the Liberal Party seen its electoral base collapse completely (even though it had lost all seats in the city). Of the two localities examined in this study it was in Stoke-on-Trent (the area which had appeared most secure for Liberalism before the war) that Labour's post-war advance was immediate and most pronounced. In the light of analysis of the period before 1914, post-war developments in Stoke-on-Trent appear startling. The striking feature of the 1918 general election in Stoke-on-Trent was the remarkable swing to Labour. This represented a significant transformation of political

[1] See R. McKibbin, *Evolution*; D. Tanner, *Political Change* and M. Petter, 'Progressive Alliance'.

allegiance and it set the tone of the politics in the region for the next century. Few areas saw such absolute destruction of the Liberals between 1918 and 1922 as did Stoke-on-Trent and yet this was an area which had previously been one of the party's heartlands.

The 1918 General Election: Candidates, Electors and Controversies

In consequence of boundary changes in 1918 Stoke-on-Trent now had three seats in Parliament; Hanley, Burslem and Stoke.[2] In 1918 the Stoke division was uncontested since all parties agreed to unanimously nominate the sitting Liberal-Labour member John Ward who remained on active service in Siberia. The following assessment of the 1918 general election, therefore, considers the contested seats of Hanley and Burslem. As discussed in analysis of Manchester in 1918, the operation of the 'coupon' saw the Asquithian Liberals as being deemed suspect in their political loyalties and thus they rarely received official Coalition endorsement. In both contested seats in Stoke-on-Trent the Liberal candidates fell under this ban.

In Hanley the 1918 general election was contested by four candidates; these were an independent Liberal (Leonard Grimwade), a Coalition/ National Democratic Party (hereafter NDP) candidate (James Seddon), the sitting Liberal member who was refused re-adoption by his party (Robert Outhwaite) and a Labour candidate (Myles Harper-Parker). With no Unionist candidate, the contest amounted to an intra-left fight although strictly speaking Seddon was not a straightforward 'left' candidate. The Liberal radical Robert Outhwaite had been returned at the by-election six years earlier. His vocal criticism of various aspects associated with the war, however, had not endeared him to either the local Liberal Association or the local press and in 1918 he was (effectively) de-selected. The Liberal Association had requested that he stand down but he refused to do so. After some persuasion, one of the area's prominent pottery manufacturers, Leonard Grimwade, was adopted as the officially sanctioned Liberal candidate. Significantly, the Hanley Liberal Association had struggled to secure a candidate. In Hanley the Liberals appear to have been unprepared for an election at this time and Grimwade had literally been adopted just days before the beginning of the campaign. He later claimed that he had been urged to stand by an

[2] The new constituencies were arranged as follows: Stoke now comprised of Stoke, Fenton and Longton, Hanley included fragments of Basford and the old Stoke parliamentary borough and Burslem comprised of the towns of Burslem and Tunstall (which was formally part of Newcastle).

'array of local interests' including the free churches, temperance organisations, manufacturers, as well as the Liberal Association. From the beginning of the contest Grimwade asserted that he was an 'enthusiastic supporter of Lloyd George' and would support the Coalition although he was anxious to stress that he did not believe the next government would be a very long one.[3] With the appearance of the coupon, however, Grimwade adopted a more combative approach and openly criticised the Coalition and its tactics although he seemed anxious not to place the blame directly upon the Prime Minister. [4]

The most controversial of Hanley's candidates in 1918 was the NDP/Coalitionist James Seddon. Seddon had an interesting background for a Coalitionist with predominantly Conservative support. Having been a trade union organiser he had previously sat as a Labour member for the Newton constituency in Cheshire between 1906 and December 1910. He had briefly been president of the T.U.C (in 1914) and by 1918 had become an active organiser for the British Workers' League. Douglas suggests that a number of NDP candidates were put forward with the primary aim of unseating Liberal or Labour MPs whose attitude towards the war had been viewed as unacceptable by the government.[5] Given Outhwaite's high profile role in condemning many aspects of the war, this may have constituted a key reason for Seddon's candidacy in Hanley. The Labour Party candidate, Myles Harper-Parker, was an exceptionally well-known local Labour activist. He had been a miner, was Secretary to the National Organisation of Enginemen and Firemen and was an alderman on the Stoke-on-Trent Council.

The new constituency of Burslem saw a slightly more conventional contest with three candidates; an independent Liberal (Sir R. W. Essex), a Coalition Conservative (Sampson Walker) and a Labour candidate (Samuel Finney). R.W. Essex described himself as a 'Coalitionist with a Liberal bias' pledging 'wholehearted support' for the government. He advocated a policy of 'fusion' between the parties and took an exceptionally strong line in relation to how to deal with Germany going so far as arguing for the immediate expulsion of all Germans from Britain. Essex had previously been MP for Cirencester until defeated in January 1910 and had then

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[3] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 19th November, 1918.
[4] Ibid.
[5] R. Douglas, *History of the Liberal Party*, p.119.

represented Stafford until its re-organisation in 1918. The couponed Coalition/Conservative (Walker) had been hopeful of standing in Hanley but had been adopted for Burslem with the appearance of James Seddon. Walker had been a councillor on Stoke-on-Trent Borough Council since 1910. Throughout the 1918 campaign he assumed a distinctly anti-Labour stance. The Labour candidate, Samuel Finney, was perceived to be a strong candidate, the local press reporting he came before electors with 'tremendous personal esteem'.[6] Finney had formerly been President of the North Staffordshire Miners' Federation and had an impressive background in municipal politics (councillor and alderman); he was a prominent Primitive Methodist (serving as a local lay preacher) and was a well-known temperance man. He had unsuccessfully contested Hanley in 1912 at the by-election but had later become MP for North-West Staffordshire upon the death of the Albert Stanley in January 1916. Finney was emblematic of industrial North Staffordshire's Lib-Lab tradition; tellingly, the *Staffordshire Sentinel* asserted Finney had been 'brought up a Liberal and has been a life-long Liberal but is now a member of the Labour Party'.[7]

The 1912 Hanley by-election had exposed the Labour Party's weakness in the area prompting the national leadership to focus more vigorously upon these kinds of constituencies. For Labour to advance the party had to improve its position in the industrial heartlands of Great Britain. In relation to organisation, the 1918 general election marked a significant turning point for the Labour Party (nationally and locally). At the time, it was repeatedly stated how Labour 'threw more vigour' into the election than any other party.[8] It was equally recognised that the now substantially larger trade union movement also strengthened Labour's position considerably in respect to organisation.[9] The extent of the Labour Party's ambitions in 1918 was clear; nationally the party put up 388 candidates compared to just 56 in December 1910. It also possessed a manifesto that demanded attention. For all these reasons the junior partner in the pre-war Progressive Alliance appeared a more serious political force. In Stoke-on-Trent (as across the country) Labour entered the 1918 general

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[6] *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 5th December 1918.
[7] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4th December, 1918.
[8] *The Times*, 9th December, 1918.
[9] During the war trade union membership had doubled from 4 million to 8 million.

election in a very different position than it had done in 1912 at the by-election and the outcome reflected this.

Like their counterparts in Manchester, from the beginning of the contest all the (independent) Liberal and Labour candidates were united in their fervent opposition to the timing of the election, viewing it as something forced upon the country, not to mention undemocratic because of the inability of soldiers and sailors to participate.[10] Tanner's suggestion that objections to an immediate appeal were based on the party organisations being unprepared appears to be a somewhat clinical assessment.[11] Certainly, Liberal organisation in some constituencies (and this was the case in Stoke-on-Trent) was not as sharp as it had been previously.[12] Primarily this was due to an absence of party workers (in particular agents).[13] However, objections to the timing of the election in Stoke-on-Trent (like Manchester) rested more on genuine anger at the perceived manipulation of the electorate by the Coalition rather than considerations in connection with party organisation. Simply, as one of the Labour candidates expressed, the general view was that the government ought to have 'waited for the lads to come back'.[14]

At the time, it was suggested by the Liberal press that more than anything else two factors determined the results in 1918; a candidate's war record and Lloyd George's leadership.[15] Indeed, where a candidate had been an out-and-out objector to the war or vocal in opposition to certain aspects associated with it, their chances of being returned were remote. A striking feature of the 1918 general election in both the contested constituencies in Stoke-on-Trent, however, was the remarkably restrained manner in which the general election was conducted. There appeared to be a marked absence of the intense patriotic fervour one imagines to have been present in 1918.

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[10] As in Manchester, the number of absent voters in Stoke-on-Trent was very high; it was estimated that in Burslem 1,200 voters out of a total of 6,200 were missing and in Hanley the figure was even greater at 3,000 (out of 7,000). A percentage of these were either missing or killed. Whilst the receiving officer declared that every effort was being made to reach absent voters this was obviously going to be extremely difficult. Figures cited in *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 4th December 1918.

[11] See D. Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 404.

[12] As earlier analysis of the 1912 by-election illustrated, however, it appears that organisation had never been a particular strength of the Liberal Party in North Staffordshire. On that occasion the regional federation was forced to intervene in an attempt to sort it out, see *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 31st July 1912.

[13] See *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 21st March 1919.

[14] See speech by Myles Harper- Parker, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 7th December, 1918.

[15] See *Manchester Guardian*, 14th December 1918.

The idea that voters were only interested in revenge and overwhelmed with a sense of nationalism is not born out by detailed analysis of the press coverage of the election campaign in this area. The debate on the terms of the peace settlement appeared more restrained and rational than one might expect. Excepting the Coalitionists, all other candidates remained at pains to stress the need for a fair and just peace.[16] As one Labour candidate proclaimed, 'obtaining a just peace does not mean the imposing on the defeated enemy the payment of a large indemnity'.[17] Rather, he outlined, what was needed was a 'clean peace which would leave no germ of hatred, revenge or vindictiveness out of which could grow a future war'.[18] Unsurprisingly the independent Liberals were also anxious to express their desire for a rational peace settlement suggesting also that future peace could only be secured by the establishment of a league of nations. On these issues there was little to separate the Liberals and Labour parties. In Stoke-on-Trent (apart from the two Coalition candidates) all others adopted an extremely moderate attitude in relation to the peace settlement. More importantly, it seems many electors appeared to support them on this aspect. Certainly, as will be seen, a percentage of the voters in Hanley clearly supported a harsh peace settlement and, in the end, went with the candidate who promised the most in this respect, but the fact remains that the majority were more supportive with the views of the outspoken Liberal Robert Outhwaite (who will be discussed below) than the *Staffordshire Sentinel* would have liked to have admitted. Ultimately, the effects of the British electoral system distorted the electoral realities. Given the Coalition landslide in 1918 it would not be hard to conclude that public opinion was overwhelmingly and only interested in revenge and retribution and national studies have shown that this became a more pronounced feature as the campaign progressed.[19] In both Stoke-on-Trent and Manchester, however, it appears that there existed a substantial extent of public opinion which ran counter to this.

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[16] Unsurprisingly the Coalition candidate in Hanley repeatedly stated Germany should pay 'to the utmost farthing for their crimes against humanity', *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 29th November, 1918.
[17] See Myles Harper-Parker speech, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 11th December 1918.
[18] Ibid.
[19] As the campaign progressed (on the advice of party managers) Lloyd George and his supporters began to adopt an increasingly hard-line approach to the peace settlement since it was reported (by candidates) that this seemed to be what electors desired; see T. Wilson, *Downfall*, p. 40 and R. Douglas, *History of the Liberal Party*, p. 119.

The 1918 General Election Campaign in Hanley

Few constituencies in 1918 had a sitting member as vocal in his opposition to the conduct of the war as did Hanley. Robert Outhwaite was not in a strict sense an out-and-out pacifist but he had taken an increasingly critical stance on various aspects associated with the conduct of war notably conscription,[20] soldiers' pay, army punishments and the timing and nature of the peace. Outhwaite had voted against the introduction of conscription in 1916, had led a parliamentary agitation for an increase in service pay and had been extremely vocal on the barbarity of certain army punishments such as 'crucifixion'.[21] He had been particularly forceful in his questioning of the Secretary of State on the issue of a negotiated peace throughout the summer of 1918.[22] Given the general climate in November 1918 it was inevitable there would be some disquiet over his stance on the war. This came primarily from the local press, however, which mounted a hostile counterattack against him arguing that he had brought shame and dishonour to the town and had made Hanley notorious. The *Staffordshire Sentinel* refused to report his meetings claiming that it was precluded from printing a large part of his speeches under the terms of the Defence of the Realm Act and, in any case, the newspaper had already 'explained, discussed and refuted' his views.[23] The *Staffordshire Sentinel* claimed that Outhwaite was attempting to 'camouflage his weird misreading of history', that he was a 'casual political wanderer with no party behind him' and concluded that his views were 'hostile to the national interest'.[24] Outhwaite responded by contending that he had been 'misrepresented and slandered for four and a half years.' He claimed his supporters were being intimidated and threatened and at one point he even threatened to sue the newspaper.[25]

The *Staffordshire Sentinel* reported just one of Outhwaite's election meetings yet this provides enough detail to allow us to appreciate the considerable forcefulness of his

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[20] Outhwaite claimed conscription had been introduced to 'fetter the masses'. For a full account of Outhwaite's views on the war see R. L. Outhwaite, *The Land or Revolution* (London, 1917). pp. 105-114 which provides an astonishing condemnation of the war and aspects associated with it. It is likely that this book alone (besides his speeches in the House of Commons) served to antagonise some quarters (notably the press) in Hanley.

[21] Outhwaite argued that the pay of British soldiers should be brought in line with those of Australians and that it should also be back-dated. The money, he suggested, could be raised by land taxation.

[22] See Outhwaite's interjections in the House of Commons, January 4th, 5th, 12th, February 29th, March 7th, 14th, 15th and 31st 1916, *Hansard.Millbanksystems.com/people/mr.robert.outhwaite/1916.*

[23] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 12th December 1918.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

arguments. In an astonishingly powerful (and brave) speech to an audience of over 4,000 people at Hanley's main hall, Outhwaite mounted a robust attack on the Government's foreign policy. If the country 'surrendered to everything that was basest', he forecast, it would only lead to the 'enslavement of the German people and lead to a war of revenge in twenty years'.[26] For Outhwaite, the choice was clear: 'a peace of revenge' or 'a peace that would last'. He told his constituents that he believed the coming government would be the 'most militaristic ever'. One point he made in particular was that British forces had never enlisted to be sent to Russia 'to protect the property of the capitalists'. Referring to his own constituency, Outhwaite declared it 'a mass of seething misery' exacerbated by the 'inhumanity of the state towards those who had served that state' and concluded by warning that 'whilst our men went to make the sacrifice of their lives for the extension of freedom and, as they thought, to support human rights...behind their back you are creating conditions which means they will not come back to greater liberty ...you are permitting to be forged the chains of their enslavement and servitude'.[27] The Victoria Hall audience was reported to have 'applauded very loudly' and there was not a single sign of dissent; had there been without doubt the *Staffordshire Sentinel* would have happily reported it in order to underpin the newspaper's attitude to Hanley's sitting member. It is worth noting that in his book *The Land or Revolution* (published the previous year) Outhwaite had written at length about the future he envisaged for returning soldiers; their fate, he argued, would be 'to take off the khaki to march in the ranks of the unemployed'.[28]

Unsurprisingly, throughout the campaign, the Coalition candidate, James Seddon, was anxious to stress that he had received 'the letter' from Lloyd George in contrast to his opponents who had not.[29] This served to provoke his opponents, especially the Liberal Grimwade who contended that Seddon was posing under 'false colours' and should stand down.[30] Seddon was highly critical of the Labour Party, arguing that social

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[26] All quotes are taken from Outhwaite's sole reported speech, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 12th December, 1918.
[27] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 12th December 1918.
[28] R. L. Outhwaite, *The Land or Revolution* (London, 1917), p. 17.
[29] Seddon's receipt of the coupon was made public on 28th November, 1918. The Liberal Grimwade vented his annoyance throughout the early stages of the contest in connection to this matter because he claimed he had already received a letter from Lloyd George wishing him success.
[30] Seddon even argued that Grimwade would split the vote allowing Outhwaite in and should retire from the contest on these grounds alone. Needless to say, the local Liberals viewed this as an

reform was 'not the prerogative of Labour' and that the party's claim to represent the workers was wholly inaccurate.[31] He declared that were the Labour Party to obtain power there would be revolution like in Russia and he went even further by attacking his Labour opponent (Myles Harper-Parker) as a man backed by 'conscientious objectors and pacifists'; if it were up to the Labour Party, he claimed, Germany would 'get off scot- free'.[32] He spent much of the rest of the campaign eulogising the 'greatest man in European politics'[33] and talking about hanging the Kaiser. In response to his critics' accusations of opportunism, Seddon declared that 'during the Armageddon old political distinctions had been submerged in this great sea of blood'.[34] Overall, as we can see, Seddon spent little time discussing actual policy, i.e. post-war reconstruction or social reform but was forced to defend his own position and play the patriotic card.[35]

The (officially sanctioned) Liberal candidate, Leonard Grimwade, conducted a focused campaign on the basis of 'a potter for the potteries' declaring that he would be a representative of local interests as opposed to party interests and he asserted change was needed in order to 'make Stoke-on-Trent a great commercial centre'.[36] Grimwade adopted a traditional Liberal platform advocating Irish Home Rule, land reform, education and issues affecting trade (transport in particular). With regards to the urgency of social reform, he said that as a recruiting officer he had 'been struck by the number of low category men'.[37] Ultimately, however, the independent Liberal's principal appeal was based upon his position as a leading pottery manufacturer. In

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outrageous proposition especially considering the fact that Seddon had appeared from nowhere, uninvited in the constituency.

[31] Seddon argued that out of four and a half million trade unionists only two million were nominally affiliated to the Labour Party and therefore, even on their own figures, they could not claim to be speaking for more than fifty percent of organised workers.

[32] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 29th November, 1918.

[33] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 12th December, 1918.

[34] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 11th December, 1918.

[35] Besides the question of the coupon, Seddon faced regular taunts from the other candidates in relation to the party he represented; no-one, they pointed out, had ever heard of the National Democratic Party. Throughout the campaign he was viewed as a 'joke' candidate but no doubt both the Liberals and Labour recognised that since he was able to claim official Coalition endorsement, he was very likely to do considerable harm to their own chances.

[36] The export trade of the local pottery industry amounted to somewhere in the region of £3,000,000 per annum and it was generally recognised that this could be substantially increased, not least by improved railways and canal navigation.

[37] Ibid.

response, the Labour Party's speakers stated that, indeed, they too wanted a 'potter for the potteries... but not from that class'.[38]

The 1918 General Election Campaign in Burslem

Burslem witnessed a more conventional contest, a triangular fight between Liberal, Labour and Unionist. Here too there was anger amongst Liberals that the coupon had been given to the Unionist candidate. Like Seddon, Burslem's officially endorsed Coalitionist (Walker) claimed that party politics had 'had their day' and what was needed now was 'fusion of the best brains in the country' and 'mutual co-operation' to enable 'great social improvements' to be made. He told voters that coalition offered a 'new conception of Government'[39] although he made little attempt to outline in detail what he thought these great improvements would entail and spent most of the campaign attempting to discredit the Liberal Association, claiming they had selected Outhwaite in 1912 and so were responsible for him now. It is clear this tactic was not always well received by his audiences, some of whom it was reported frequently shouted 'talk about politics' back to him.[40] Like Seddon, Walker also spent some time outlining his fears about the Labour Party; he argued that whilst he felt the local Labour candidates were 'sincere and honest men' he believed that the pacifists within the Labour Party had tried to 'weaken resolve during the war, discredit the forces ...and were making excuses for the enemy'.[41] He also declared that he believed Labour's policy programme to be one which 'promoted war between the classes'.[42]

In contrast to the Coalition candidate's vagueness in respect of policy, the Labour candidates in Hanley and Burslem articulated a practical programme of reform and reconstruction focusing attention on issues of immediate concern such as demobilisation and adequate allowances for returned soldiers and their dependents. Aspects of Finney's programme also included improvement of housing, the lowering of the pension age to sixty, complete equality for the sexes, complete nationalisation of all key industries[43], abolition of D.O.R.A. and the abolition of conscription. These

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[38] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 11th December 1918.
[39] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 7th December 1918.
[40] See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 7th December 1918.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] This included mines, railways, minerals, oils, munitions, waterways as well as the nationisation of the land.

things he told voters were 'more important than hanging the Kaiser'.[44] He also proposed Home Rule 'all round' and the establishment of a league of nations.[45] Finney asserted that he did not believe the government had 'put forward anything of a definite character'.[46] He also fiercely condemned the government for the timing of the election, more so than any other candidate in Stoke-on-Trent in 1918; at one meeting, for example, he told his audience that the government 'wanted to blindfold folk and lead them to forget by holding a general election'.[47] Finney was exceedingly critical of the 'coupon'; he told one meeting that whilst the 'government could trust the people to fight and pay taxes; they could not be trusted to select their own candidates'.[48] He condemned continued press censorship which he argued was just an attempt to exclude the masses, as he articulated; 'the working-classes were very important when something had to be done (the war) but they were not quite so important when they were no longer needed'.[49] Like most Labour candidates in 1918, Finney made a direct appeal to discharged soldiers (not that there would have been that many of them in the constituency).[50] During and after the 1912 by-election Samuel Finney had been widely and publicly criticised, ridiculed even, as a weak and ineffective candidate who had been out of his depth in relation to policy. Even within his party many had held this view. In 1918, however, (excepting Outhwaite) Finney was arguably Stoke-on-Trent's most outstanding critic of the Lloyd George Coalition and a powerful advocate of post-war re-construction.

As in Hanley, the Liberal candidate in Burslem, Sir Walter Essex, defined himself as 'a sturdy supporter of the Coalition'[51] although he added that he was 'mortified to see more [of it] pass under Conservative domination'. Whilst he believed there should be cross party co-operation until the peace was signed, he remained a fierce critic of the way the election was being conducted saying that it 'had been sprung in such a way

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[44] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 13th December, 1918. G. D. H. Cole remembers how audiences at meetings he had spoken at responded well to his 'demonstrations of the absurdity of slogans such as Hang the Kaiser'; see G. D. H. Cole, *History of the Labour Party From 1914* (New York, 1969), p. 85.
[45] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 29th November, 1918.
[46] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3rd December, 1918.
[47] Ibid.
[48] *Staffordshire Sentinel,* 13th December, 1918.
[49] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3rd December, 1918.
[50] See Labour advertisements, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 7th December, 1918.
[51] Declaring this as the beginning of the campaign, be became increasingly hostile towards the Coalition, however, especially in connection to the coupon, see *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 11th December 1918.

that the soldier was practically disenfranchised'.[52] He went so far as to say that the election was 'an attempted invasion of the right of the people to free choice'.[53] Interestingly, Sir Walter Essex was the only candidate in Stoke-on-Trent to make any direct appeal to the newly enfranchised female electors in 1918.[54] His meetings regularly included female platform speakers who urged women to 'take an active part in the political life of the country'; as 'shareholders in the governing of their native land' women were told 'the home life of the nation and the health of the people' depended on them.[55] The Liberal Association clearly recognised that organising the female vote was not going to be an easy task however. As Mrs Rowley Moody (wife of the chairman of the local Liberal Council) noted, only about 60 of the party's workers in the constituency were women.[56] Given the numbers of female voters and limited time, this did not facilitate making the female electors enthusiastic.[57] Though it is important to recognise that at the beginning of the contest the party managers did not expect women to vote in large numbers so this might partially explain why few candidates made direct appeals to the new female electorate.[58]

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[52] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 5th December, 1918.
[53] Ibid.
[54] In Burslem 11,000 of the total 33,789 voters were women, cited in *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 12th December 1918.
[55] Mrs. A. Rowley- Moody addressed many of Sir Walter Essex's meetings emphasising the need for fair treatment of soldiers and allowances for wives and mothers. She was an extremely outspoken critic of Lloyd George and the Coalition; on one occasion asking 'what was the use in sending such dummies to parliament', see *Staffordshire Advertiser,* 13th December, 1918.
[56] There did not exist a women's Liberal Association in the area but this was something the party was anxious to rectify and in December 1918 the Association outlined plans for the setting up of such an organisation.
[57] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 13th December, 1918.
[58] *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 19th March 1919.

The 1918 General Election in Stoke-on-Trent: Results and Analysis

Fig. 1 Hanley (Turnout 58.9%)

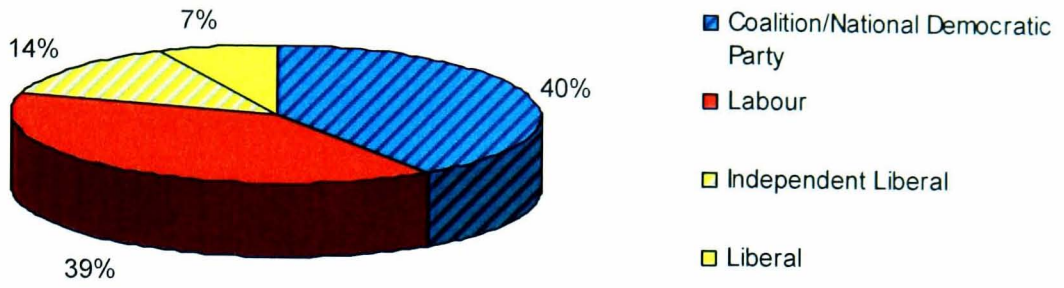
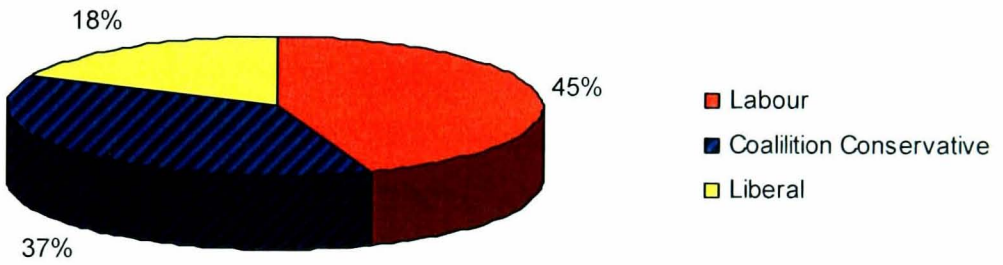


Fig. 2 Burslem (Turnout 56.6%)



The results of the 1918 general election in Stoke-on-Trent are interesting for many reasons. Inevitably, Hanley's sitting member, Robert Outhwaite, was defeated although probably not as decisively as the local press might have wished (see fig. 1).[59] In securing nearly three thousand votes (13.6% of the total) Outhwaite had demonstrated that there existed a significant degree of dissatisfaction in respect to various aspects associated with the conduct of the war. Hanley was captured on a minority vote by the NDP/Coalitionist James Seddon reflecting results across the rest of the country.[60] What surprised many was the substantial advance made by the Labour Party in Hanley; polling nearly 38% of the popular vote, the Labour candidate

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[59] Outhwaite was not alone in having being de-selected by his constituency organisation and subsequently defeated of course; other Liberal 'pacifists' including C. P. Trevelyan and D. Mason also suffered the same fate.

[60] Nationally, ten NDP candidates were returned to the House of Commons in 1918. One later defected to the Labour Party. All were defeated in 1922.

had obtained just 335 votes (1.7% of the total) less than the winning Coalitionist. Whilst Outhwaite had come third, worse still was the disastrous performance of the official Liberal who only managed to poll little over 7% of the vote. The Liberal vote had collapsed completely in the constituency. It is likely that Outhwaite took votes away from the official Liberal so a more accurate assessment of the total Liberal poll was 20.9% which reflects similar results from other localities (such as Manchester examined earlier in the present study).[61] Nonetheless, compared to previous electoral performance, the 1918 general election represented almost annihilation for the Liberals in a part of the country generally considered to be one of the party's heartlands. Significantly, the total anti-Coalition poll amounted to nearly 60% of the vote. Ultimately, despite the election of James Seddon, the Potteries electorate remained predominantly left of centre and progressive in outlook.

The constituency of Burslem saw an even greater advance for Labour (see fig. 1); the party captured the seat obtaining nearly 45% of the vote (a majority of 7% over the second placed couponed Coalition Conservative). This made Labour's victory in Burslem one of the most spectacular results for the party anywhere in the country. As historians have noted, the 1918 general election did not, in fact, represent a tremendous step forward for Labour representation in the House of Commons. The election proved disappointing in fact; just 57 MPs were returned (in the context of a greatly increased number of candidates). Labour's success in Burslem was the exception to the rule but, nonetheless, in terms of the Potteries, the result changed the political landscape forever.

The Asquithian Liberals faired equally badly in Burslem as they did in Hanley; finishing bottom of the poll (obtaining 18% of the vote). Again, the total anti-Coalition vote was extremely high: at 62%. Comparisons with previous elections are difficult given the boundary changes, the reconstitution of the constituencies and the exceedingly low turnout, but taking the two constituencies together it hardly needs reiterating that the Labour Party had witnessed a remarkable reversal in fortune. As we have seen, in 1912 the Labour Party had been unable to make any significant inroads in Hanley at all, had no permanent organisation and had suffered a

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[61] In Manchester the average Liberal popular vote was about 20% in comparable contests (three or four cornered) and went up to 25% where the party faced only Conservative opposition.

humiliating defeat at the by-election. The town appeared to remain staunchly Liberal in both politics and culture. By 1918 the Labour Party had so very nearly won the seat. That and a sensational victory in neighbouring Burslem meant that, compared to other industrial localities in Britain, Labour's advance in Stoke-on-Trent in the 1918 general election was more than striking.

The 1918 General Election in Perspective

The political situation was extremely confused in 1918; national events and the national position of the parties influenced voter perceptions of the respective parties in the constituencies. It is arguable that in 1918 there existed a considerably higher degree of dissatisfaction with the government's war policies than has generally been recognised, especially in relation to the slowness of demobilisation, conscription itself and the timing of the general election. This was almost certainly the case in Hanley and Burslem when one considers that more electors voted against the Coalition than for it. The anti-Coalition vote amounted to 59.6% and 62% respectively.[62] As in Manchester, the low forces' turnout was significant.[63] Returning soldiers were likely to have been less persuaded by official propaganda than civilians and potentially held more moderate views towards enemy nations. On both these counts, they were likely to have voted against the government.

In assessing the 1918 general election, Arthur Nicholson (secretary of the Midland Liberal Federation) concluded that there were some very clear reasons why usually loyal Liberals switched to Labour and he identified two factors in particular. First, large numbers of Liberals were 'so fiercely anti-Coalition and anti-conscription that they voted Labour as the most marked way of expressing that sentiment' and secondly, in relation to policy Labour's manifesto 'commanded the general assent of Liberals'.[64] This implies a significant shift to the left among Liberal supporters. Careful consideration of the local evidence in Hanley and Burslem confirms these assumptions. Other factors which may have contributed to the Liberal 'holocaust' (as

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[62] The total anti-Liberal vote in Burslem amounted to 81.6% and in Hanley (counting Outhwaite as a Liberal) this was 79.1% and the total anti-Labour vote (in Hanley) was 61.3%.
[63] In Manchester less than a fifth of the absent soldier and sailor electors voted. Out of the twenty million electors nationwide 3.9 million service voters were sent ballot papers from which only 900,000 (a quarter) voted.
[64] *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 21st March 1919.

The Times called it)[65] included the leadership's failure to provide direction. As Turner suggests, weak leadership destroyed the Liberal Party's ability to fight an election in 1918 effectively.[66] Asquith's failure to provide direction impacted greatly upon the party in the constituencies. It is worthwhile to note here that during the campaign in Stoke-on-Trent, neither Liberal candidate made any mention of their leader by name, suggesting that the candidates may have been attempting to disassociate themselves from the national debacle. In an age of mass communication, however, when electors were well aware of what was happening nationally this was virtually impossible. The party split and the war had also impacted on local organisation; the routine organisation of the party, of course, was severely disrupted by the war.[67] The loss of party agents and activists placed considerable pressure on the local associations. This was the same for all parties, however, and the extent to which it disproportionately disadvantaged the Liberals should not be over-stated. After all, the Liberals had perfected a highly sophisticated organisation after 1900 and compared to the Conservative Party had been pre-eminent in party management on the ground. Nonetheless, it does appear that the Liberals in Stoke-on-Trent were more ill-prepared to fight a contest in 1918 compared to the party in Manchester. While analysis of Stoke-on-Trent does not lend support to the suggestion that Liberal organisation was weak to the point of being a disaster, there were clearly some problems. Moreover, what is clear is that Labour's organisation had improved considerably and the party was prepared for the contest in a way that it appeared the Liberal Party was not.[68] It is widely recognised how the extent of trade union organisation in a particular constituency contributed significantly to Labour's organisational capabilities. In the mining districts candidates received considerable financial assistance.[69] This needs to be born in mind when assessing Labour's advance in 1918 in North Staffordshire. Yet the continuity of local leadership and the forcefulness of Labour's evangelicalism

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[65] *The Times*, 30th December 1918.

[66] J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War* (London and New Haven, 1992), p. 135.

[67] In part this was also connected to the existence of the party truce. The Secretary of the Midland Liberal Federation, for example, was anxious to stress in his post-election report that he had repeatedly urged the associations to observe the truce and 'do no party work or not to carry on any propaganda'. Given that the election had come as a particular shock to the Liberal Party it was (because of this and the split) severely ill placed to fight a campaign effectively, see *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 21st March 1919.

[68] The Labour Party had been restructuring its organisation for the fifteen months prior to the election and in August 1917 Arthur Henderson had left the government in order to devote his attention to this; in particular setting about obtaining large sums from the trade unions, see R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, pp. 112- 123.

[69] See R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, pp. 156-162.

(principally connected to policy on post-war reconstruction) were also crucial to the party's challenge in 1918. In areas such as Stoke-on-Trent, Labour remained (as it had been before 1914) evangelical and propagandist but it possessed a new focus on advanced (and relevant) policy which amounted to a powerful appeal.

Of the many factors (such as abstention and the women's vote) which contributed to the poor Liberal poll in 1918 a number of other aspects must be considered. Liberal party managers believed a great many of those who had abstained were Liberals who did not wish to vote for the Coalition but would not vote against their party. Both the contested constituencies in Stoke-on-Trent saw exceptionally low turnouts in 1918 (56.5% in Burslem and 58.9% in Hanley). Furthermore, it was more or less certain that in most areas the women's vote went against the Liberals. As Arthur Nicholson observed, 'it is perhaps not too much to say that whatever class they belonged they gave in bulk an anti-German vote' and that 'Lloyd George's declarations against Germany appealed to a by no means unnatural sentiment in the breasts of mothers, wives and daughters smarting under a sense of bereavement, loss and suffering'.[70]

Locally, a number of other aspects need to be borne in mind when considering the advance made by Labour in 1918 (as indeed later in 1922). The period during the war was critical in relation to the politics of the pottery workers (the largest sector in the area). The earlier stages of the war had witnessed a number of strikes after which the various unions then took the momentous step in voting to establish a political fund. Furthermore, an equally significant leap forward had been taken in 1917 when the pottery unions (for the first time) combined to form one single organisation (the Ceramic and Allied Trade Union). By the end of the war the potters' union claimed a total membership of 40,000 (a fivefold increase when compared to 1914.[71] Altogether, whilst the 1918 general election had been a disaster for the Liberal Party in Stoke-on-Trent (and across the country) the Liberals believed they would fight

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[70] *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 21st March 1919.

[71] The immediate post-war period was a critical time for the development of the pottery union and many aspects of intense dispute within the industry were settled (because of union intervention) during this time, the most important being the abolition of 'good from the oven' regulations in 1919. For detailed coverage of these aspects see F. Burchill and R. Ross, *A History of the Potters' Union* (Hanley, 1977), pp. 165-169.

another day.[72] It is essential to recognise this context since it is arguably from this point (*after* 1918) that the splits and schisms within the Liberal Party really took their toll in tearing the party apart leaving it a shadow of its former self and from that there was no recovery.

5.2: The 1922 General Election in Stoke-on-Trent

The political parties in Stoke-on-Trent appear to have been taken by surprise at the prospect of an election in 1922 and consequently the constituency organisations were slow in their preparation for the contest.[73] As a result of the last general election the political situation was as follows: Hanley was held by an Independent-Coalitionist, Burslem by the Labour Party and Stoke by an independent Liberal-Labour candidate who had been unopposed in 1918 who now described himself as Independent Labour. Samuel Finney who had won Burslem for the Labour Party in 1918 had recently decided to retire at the forthcoming election, having apparently fallen out with the Labour Party.

The Political Situation: New Alliances, Candidates and Ideology

The 1922 general election saw a triangular contest in Hanley between a Labour candidate, Myles Harper-Parker, an Asquithian Liberal, John Whitehouse,[74] and the sitting member, James Seddon, who now stood as a straightforward Independent. Stoke and Burslem both saw straight fights involving John Ward (Independent Labour) and an official Labour Party candidate, local trade unionist John Watts, in the former and in the latter between Andrew Maclaren (Labour), and a National Liberal candidate, Sydney Malkin, neither of whom had contested the seat previously. None of the constituencies saw a Conservative candidate, suggesting that the local party was either unable to mount a serious challenge or that they perceived defeating Labour the key priority. It is significant that a week after the election had been declared the

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[72] It ought to be remembered that there were still 160 Liberals in the House of Commons so the Liberals theoretically remained the second party of the state even if a divided one and even though Labour formed the single largest party of opposition in the house.

[73] The Labour Party stands out, however, as having undertaken a significant amount of work in both Hanley and Burslem, having held regular indoor and outdoor demonstrations for some time. Little had been done in Stoke since the party had remained undecided as to whether it would put forward a candidate. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 23rd October, 1922.

[74] The relatively young (49 years of age) John Whitehouse represented a significant coup for the Hanley Liberals. He had been elected for mid-Lanarkshire in January 1910 and had been a member of many departmental committees relating to education or children's' legislation. He went on to become Parliamentary Private Secretary to Lloyd George from 1913 to 1915. He had been defeated in 1918 contesting Hamilton.

Burslem Conservative and Unionist Association confirmed that they would continue to provide assistance to the (adopted) Coalition Liberal candidate.[75] The Chairman of the Conservatives told the local press that whilst Malkin 'had always been progressive and a firm believer in trade unionism' he was reassuringly 'opposed to anything that would destroy the best interests of the country by revolutionary, Communist or Socialist methods'.[76] For his part, Malkin stated how he 'wholeheartedly supported' Bonar Law because the country presently 'faced a great danger in the Labour Party' and so they were 'forced to put their shoulders together'.[77] Conservative assistance did not go so far as contributing to Malkin's funds, however, and he had to pay his own election expenses although he let it be known that he was doing so in order to 'preserve [his] independence from any wire-pullers.'[78] Throughout the campaign Malkin received valuable support from many prominent local Conservatives. The local press even began to label him the 'Liberal and Unionist' candidate although he never used this term himself. Given Malkin's local prestige it is perhaps unsurprising that the local Conservative organisation had decided not to oppose him.[79] He was one of the district's most prominent pottery manufacturers, president of the local Chamber of Commerce and had a long background in the municipal politics of the town including serving as Mayor of Burslem (1907-1908) after which he was appointed alderman on Stoke-on-Trent Borough Council.[80] Like the majority of North Staffordshire Liberals he was also a well-known and active Methodist.

Malkin's Labour opponent in Burslem was Andrew Maclaren. At 39 years of age Maclaren was far younger than any previous Labour candidate in the district and represented a very different type of Labour man. He was fiercely radical compared to his predecessors. Born in Glasgow, Maclaren had been educated at the Glasgow

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[75] At the time of Sydney Malkin's adoption in December 1921 the local Conservatives pledged their support and agreed not to oppose him. Once the national position of the Coalition changed it became unclear as to whether this assurance would remain. The Burslem Conservatives waited a week before making their intentions known after Sir George Younger had advised the local associations that while no arrangement existed nationally the constituencies were free to run candidates against Coalition Liberals if they wished. As it turned out, a third of Coalition Liberal seats came under attack from their former Coalition allies, see T. Wilson, *Downfall,* p. 229.

[76] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 30th October, 1922.

[77] See ibid.

[78] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 7th November, 1922.

[79] Malkin came from a very well known Staffordshire Liberal family; his Uncle being Wilcox Edge regarded as the 'grand old man' of north Staffordshire Liberalism (a point often reiterated in the press)

[80] In economic policy Malkin was a totally committed Free Trader and was unlikely to waver on this but given that this was no longer the issue for the Conservatives that it had been historically this did not pose a problem for co-operation.

School of Art and had become an engineer. He had initially been a Liberal[81] but had then joined the ILP and the Union of Democratic Control during the early stages of the war.[82] Maclaren had been an associate of Hanley's former member Robert Outhwaite and the two had much in common; they were both highly critical of the war and keen land reformers. From the outset of the campaign, Labour's opponents attempted to play the 'red menace' card in an attempt to drum up right wing misconceptions of Labour's nationalisation programme. The only candidate in Stoke-on-Trent not to employ this strategy was the (Asquithian) Liberal, John Whitehouse, in Hanley. The tactics, strategy and policies of the respective participants shall now be now discussed.

For the first time in the history of the Stoke parliamentary constituency the 1922 general election saw an official and entirely independent Labour Party candidate. The appearance of an official Labour candidate in opposition to Ward caused considerable discontent amongst Stoke's Liberals and Conservatives who had already agreed to co-operate in their support of Ward's candidature.[83] Whilst it could have been the case that the Liberals and Conservatives might have anticipated Labour's intervention (so underpinning their decision to endorse Ward) lack of evidence makes this difficult to say with certainty.

Ward had been elected in 1906 as a Liberal-Labour member and the Liberals had always claimed him as one of their own which was unsurprising given that he had always accepted the Liberal whip in parliament. By 1922, Ward had become increasingly right-wing, however, so by this stage appeared a more attractive alternative to the local Conservatives. During the 1922 campaign he went to considerable lengths to attack his Labour opponents who he claimed were extremists and revolutionaries. Ward sought desperately to disassociate himself from the Labour Party arguing that it was too narrow, not representative of the whole working-class and he declared he did not intend to 'sign away his liberty'.[84] Ward argued that, for

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[81] Maclaren continued to espouse Liberal doctrines, most notably the single tax ideology, albeit now within a Labour context. He saw little incompatibility of Labour's programme with more Liberal-based ideology such as land reform.

[82] Biographical details from M. Stenton and S. Lees, *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament, Volume 3* (Sussex and New Jersey, 1979) p. 227.

[83] As in Burslem the Stoke Conservatives waited until the 30th October to announce their support of Ward.

[84] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6th November, 1922.

him, the war had 'killed party [politics]' and he was 'prepared to help any reasonable combination which may evolve to carry out the internal government of the country'.[85] Ward believed that opposition to him had been 'engineered by an extremist section of the Labour Party.[86] It was more likely, however, that the local Labour Party had grown weary of Ward's Lib-Labism believing they had as much right as anyone to contest the seat especially since the party believed they now had the complete support of a significant number of the trade unions in the area. In the context of economic depression combined with the effects of the miners' strikes of 1920 and 1921 which had been almost as disruptive to the pottery workers as they had been to the miners, there now emerged a more definable sense of union solidarity in the area and, moreover, a recognition of the need for combined political activity. It is also arguable that because of industrial hardship the disparity between employer and worker became all the more clear; this undoubtedly facilitated a political identity very distinct from former Liberal-Labour sentiments. As analysis of Stoke-on-Trent demonstrates, throughout the 1922 contest this was evidenced by the language and tone deployed by Labour candidates whose speeches were clearly influenced by strong sentiments of class injustice. Whatever the reasons: the point remains that the most prominent unions in the district; the Miners' Federation and the Pottery Workers' Society, were for the first time completely united behind a genuinely independent Labour Party candidate.

The 1922 General Election Campaign in Stoke-on-Trent

The Labour Party officially launched its campaign on 24th October with a large demonstration in Hanley's Victoria Hall and during the same meeting the party's key objectives for the forthcoming contest were outlined. The national manifesto *Labour's Call to the People* was issued by the National Executive two days later and received considerable attention from both the national and local press. From the beginning of the campaign Labour remained anxious to assert itself as a constitutional and moderate organisation: Labour's opening meeting in Hanley saw platform speakers reiterate how as a party they had always 'fought the battle of constitutionalism and had fought extremism in their own ranks .... They were neither communists nor revolutionaries and [were] committed to upholding of the authority of the House of

[85] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 30th October, 1922.
[86] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 7th November, 1922.

Commons'.[87] Harper-Parker claimed that 'to achieve social and economic emancipation workers must look to a party of their own creation'.[88] The Labour Party represented a 'new idea in politics', he declared, because it 'determined to secure a more humanised economic and industrial system' and he added that Labour were often accused of living 'in a world of idle dreams' but 'many policies the party had stood for over the past 25 years were now accepted planks of the other parties platforms today [so] what was in the land of dreams today could clearly come into the realm of practical politics tomorrow'.[89]

The national Labour Party manifesto generated a considerable degree of discussion. In it Labour advocated an extensive programme of social, industrial and economic reform and a progressive foreign policy.[90] The manifesto's economic proposals were likely to be the most controversial. Briefly, the programme made the argument that the national debt was a 'dead weight burden' and proposed the creation of a war debt redemption fund by a special graduated levy on fortunes exceeding £5,600. The manifesto stated that the party would require 'some degree of restitution from the fortunes made during the war'. Labour's economic policy amounted to a system of taxation whereby the burden would fall according to a person's ability to pay. In the context of 1922 this represented radical economic thinking and selling it to certain sections of society (the wealthy/middle-classes) would prove difficult. Other aspects of economic policy included a proposed super-tax on large incomes above £850 and the imposition of death duties on large estates. In relation to unemployment Labour promised 'work or maintenance,' i.e. adequate support or employment would be provided. This would entail the establishment of a 'large number of programmes of necessary and useful public works'. The manifesto advocated a massive programme of industrial re-organisation including the complete nationalisation of the nation's key industries; coal, railways, transport, iron and steel. In terms of social policy Labour emphasised the urgent needs of the nation in relation to health and housing. More generous provision of old age pensions was proposed, the complete abolition of the poor law and an extensive programme of house building. Another important policy

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[87] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 25th October, 1922.
[88] Ibid.
[89] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 25th October, 1922.
[90] The Labour Party manifesto details are taken from *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 26th October 1922 where it was printed in full.

commitment was the party's declared resistance to any attempt to 'cut off or cut down' ex-servicemen's pensions.

The Labour Party Campaign in Stoke-on-Trent

Reflecting the temper of the national manifesto the central issue for Labour's candidates in Stoke-on-Trent in 1922 concerned the record of the Coalition government and how it had categorically 'failed the people' and that neither did Bonar Law's new administration appear to possess concrete policies. In Stoke-on-Trent, Labour's candidates focused upon a variety of issues outlined in the national manifesto but made a point of applying them directly to the local conditions. An issue of increasing concern for pottery workers was industrial disease (in particular pneumoconiosis) and the extent of poor health in the city. As Andrew Maclaren observed, death rates in Stoke-on-Trent were appalling. Tunstall (with only one exception) possessed the worst death rate in the country[91] and also had a higher infant mortality rate than anywhere in the United Kingdom. In one powerful speech Maclaren argued that despite the potter 'being a pre-eminent craftsman [he] lived under conditions the royal family wouldn't keep dogs under'.[92] Another repeated theme during the contest was the inequality of the burdens of war; Myles Harper-Parker in Hanley, for example, reminded one audience of how 'Britain had lost 746,000 men, 1 million had been wounded and yet 340,000 men had made £2,846,000' and the poorer classes were now facing grinding poverty as well as being asked to carry a disproportionate burden.[93] Throughout the campaign the Labour candidates stressed the 'just and equitable' character of the party's economic proposals whilst at the same time declaring that there was nothing confiscatory about the Capital Levy.[94] They repeatedly asked their audiences how many of those present had more than £5,000; unsurprisingly the response was always in the negative. John Watts in Stoke also connected his Labour politics with his religion, emphasising that

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[91] Maclaren pinpointed the death rates of pottery workers as compared to agricultural labourers. At aged 45 the death rate for pottery workers was 31.64 compared with 4.22 for agricultural labourers. At 55 it was 54.15 compared with 19.06. It should be noted that general health remained exceedingly poor in this area, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 8th November 1922. This was reflected, for example, by the fact that pottery workers were even classified as being five years older than they actually were for insurance purposes, see F. Burchill and R. Ross, *A History of the Potters' Union,* p. 150 who point out that health and safety at this time remained the primary focus of the Potters' Union.

[92] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 8th November, 1922.

[93] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 7th November 1922.

[94] See Harper-Parker on Capital Levy, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 7th November, 1922.

the principles of economic justice were contained within the New Testament.[95] He told one audience how 'a man's politics should be his religion and his religion his politics' and claimed that the attainment of a just distribution of wealth would lead to the 'realisation of the kingdom of God on Earth.'[96] In an area so heavily religious in outlook such an approach was potentially persuasive. As we can see, the Labour candidates in Stoke-on-Trent repeatedly referred to the inequality of the sacrifices of war and the catalogue of broken government promises. A significant amount of the Labour candidates' time was inevitably taken up with refuting their opponent's accusation of Communist comparisons. The candidates were very quick to assert their feelings on such comparisons; Watts was emblematic in declaring such 'not just unfair, but below the belt' as he told voters that he had never 'confiscated anyone's property or inflicted pain on anyone' but he asked his audience to consider British policy towards Russia, which had been a disaster.[97]

The Labour Party's candidate in Burslem (Andrew Maclaren) made explicit efforts to appeal directly to Liberal supporters in the constituency. As a former Liberal himself he agued that only Labour now existed as a viable party of progressive politics; they were taking the place of the old Liberal Party.[98] Maclaren asked voters whether they were going to vote for Bonar Law and his colleagues or a party that actually had a programme. Throughout the campaign, interest in Maclaren's meetings become so great that people started to pay large sums of money to hear him speak. A significant proportion of his supporters were reported as being extremely young.[99]

The Liberal Campaign in Stoke-on-Trent

The two Liberal candidates who stood in Stoke-on-Trent in 1922 came from opposing wings of their 'party' and so (unsurprisingly) there were marked political and ideological differences between the two. John Whitehouse in Hanley represented the radical wing of the Liberal Party and was a noted social reformer with a strong political background.[100] From the outset of the 1922 general election campaign,

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[95] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4th November, 1922.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 5th November 1922.
[99] *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 7th November 1922.
[100] Whitehouse had been a member of the Home Office Departmental Committee during the implementation of the Employment of Children Act in 1909 and he had led a successful parliamentary agitation for the improvement of housing in mining districts (which led to a Royal Commission on the

Whitehouse attacked the government's record in respect of social reform. He declared himself to be a social reform candidate and 'had no hesitation in regarding himself as a labour candidate [because] all [his] public life [he had] represented the labouring classes'.[101] Whitehouse's stance on the majority of issues was not dissimilar from the Labour position. Whilst he opposed Labour's Capital Levy, he believed in a graduated income tax and also in the taxation of land values. The land question, Whitehouse argued, was the root of the social problem and he also advocated nationalisation of all key industries, in particular the mines and railways.[102] Unemployment, he stated, was a scandal and while he had 'no scientific solution to it' he objected to an 'inadequate dole' as a solution, especially since there was tremendous work to be done (houses, agriculture and public works). In particular Whitehouse sought to emphasise the government's broken promises and betrayal in relation to ex-servicemen who were 'tramping the streets trying to get employment'.[103] He stated that he would like to see the total abolition of the House of Lords[104] and free secondary and higher education for all. In Hanley, therefore, the Liberal and Labour candidates both offered radical programmes.

As we have seen in analysis of both Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent, the Labour Party suffered from an inability to distinguish itself from Liberalism in terms of policy and ideology prior to 1914. By 1922 this had been reversed and arguably the radical wing of the Liberal Party found it increasingly difficult to articulate anything that official Labour was not advocating. As Wilson acknowledges, in 1922 many Liberals had sought to handle 'the Labour problem' by 'making criticisms [that] did not amount to outright denunciation'[105] but this simply served to reinforce the fact that Labour, as the *Liberal Magazine* expressed, had 'stolen their thunder'.[106] Despite the efforts of radical Liberals such as John Whitehouse in Hanley, the Liberal Party nationally, as Wilson contends, 'did not present the appearance of an active force for social

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issue). Outside parliament Whitehouse had head of Toynbee Hall and had worked extensively with the poor (including in particular the university settlement scheme in Manchester). Biographical details from *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament*, volume 2, p. 370.

[101] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 1st November, 1922.

[102] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 31st October, 1922.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid, 1st November, 1922.

[105] T. Wilson, *Downfall*, p. 232.

[106] *Liberal Magazine*, November 1922.

reform'.[107] As analysis of Manchester has shown, there were simply too few candidates like Whitehouse. Furthermore, the Capital Levy and nationalisation gave Labour's radicalism a specific and practical economic focus from those on the left of the Liberal Party. On this aspect the Liberal and Labour platforms were clearly distinguishable although, as we have seen, candidates such as W. M. Pringle did make a capital levy a key plank of his campaign during the 1919 by-election in Manchester. Arguably, however, Labour's economic policy struck a greater chord with many working-class voters than continued Liberal emphasis on Free-Trade and land reform during the 1922 general election.

In Burslem, the National Liberal, Sydney Malkin, focused virtually exclusively on his objections to the Labour Party's programme which he claimed 'aimed to abolish capitalism' and 'surrender liberty to bureaucratic control'.[108] Malkin argued that Labour's programme amounted to 'total confiscation' which, if enacted, would eradicate private enterprise and thrift and he also stated that whilst he firmly believed in the general principle of trade unionism, he was opposed to 'anything that would destroy the best interests of the country by Bolshevik, revolutionary or socialistic methods'.[109] Malkin constantly reiterated how he believed employers and workers 'should be friends' and voiced his strong objection to 'disastrous class struggles'. He stated that he believed 'wholeheartedly' in Bonar Law's programme although he was never able to elaborate on what that constituted. Some of the few issues Malkin did address included war pensions (which he said he thought ought to be simplified) and the problem of unemployment (which he believed could be alleviated by means of schemes of productive work and an extension of unemployment insurance). For much of the campaign, however, Malkin was forced to defend his war record and that of his sons.[110] The National Liberal campaign in Burslem was largely negative and offered little discussion of policy, in great contrast to the (Asquithian) Liberal campaign in the neighbouring constituency of Hanley where the candidate advocated a radical

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[107] T. Wilson, *Downfall*, p. 233.
[108] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 30th October, 1922.
[109] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6th November, 1922.
[110] Malkin had been a recruiting officer with responsibility for providing names of non-able bodied men who were not to be enlisted. Many of these, however, were subsequently called-up and there clearly existed an extent of local disquiet in connection to this. His sons had been too ill and too young (he stated) to enlist but again, this remained a controversial subject for Malkin during the election campaign and he continued to encounter an identifiable degree of hostility, see *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 8th November, 1922. Other candidates were very rarely questioned on their war records, including even Maclaren who had been a prominent pacifist.

programme entirely avoiding any form of 'red scare' tactics. These differences epitomised Liberal divisions at that time; whilst independent Liberals more often than not remained at least in some way progressively minded, the National Liberals appeared virtually indistinguishable from the Conservatives. In Burslem, Malkin could have easily been a Conservative candidate and no doubt this is why he was assured of local Conservative support. This swing to the right amongst the National Liberals represented a major stumbling bloc to the reunification of the Liberal Party in an immediate sense and one could also suggest that it precipitated (and then underpinned) an anti-Labour cleavage during the 1920s within the re-united party; neither of which aided the Liberal Party.

The Independent Campaigns: Seddon and Ward

Hanley's sitting member, James Seddon, who had captured the seat as a Coalitionist in 1918 and now contested the seat as an Independent adopted a similar approach to Malkin by focusing virtually exclusively on the 'Labour menace': Seddon told voters that the 1922 general election was 'about systems; Labour's system [was] the road to destruction [and] if they started with nationalisation they would end with Communism and anarchy'.[111] Seddon claimed they were 'threatened with revolution and faced the threat of confiscation'.[112] Few in Hanley, however, possessed much to 'confiscate' and such red scare tactics were unlikely to persuade voters that the road to ruin was nigh. Seddon endured a difficult campaign in 1922, including the frequent sabotage of his election posters[113] and considerable heckling at his meetings, which he believed represented an organised attempt to break up his meetings.[114]

In Stoke, the sitting member John Ward also fought the contest largely on the question of a perceived Socialist threat.[115] Ward claimed he was 'astonished' that he

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[111] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 2nd November, 1922.
[112] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6th November, 1922.
[113] Seddon's election slogan was 'Peace, Economy and Progress' which appeared on most of his election posters. This was frequently replaced with graffiti reading 'Party Exchanged Periodically' alluding to the fact that Seddon had changed party affiliation on a number of occasions.
[114] Many Coalition Liberals across the country suffered the same fate; Wilson cites one candidate in Sheffield, for instance, as being forced to take out a newspaper advert declaring he would 'attempt to address electors' illustrating the levels of hostility towards the Coalition Liberals in particular. It is curious that the Coalition Conservatives did not appear to suffer in the same way.
[115] Ward regularly referred to his background as a navvy; in his words 'one of the hardest occupations around' and that he was entitled to attend trade union congresses unlike people such as Maclaren and Wedgwood. He overlooked the fact that he did not actually possess full trade union endorsement in his own constituency however.

was being opposed by 'a combination of extremists', explaining that in the 'present abnormal conditions' he would support 'any group capable of carrying on government'.[116] He was keen to reiterate how he could have had the official 'Labour tag' if he had wished but this would have necessitated joining the party and obeying the party whip which he was unprepared to do. Throughout the contest Ward cited his experiences in Russia and argued that if Labour's programme was enacted in Britain the country would face the same 'anarchy and ruin' as that country.[117] Ward's organisation appears to have been extremely weak in comparison to his official Labour Party opponent.[118] He admitted that he had no money for the huge posters such as those appearing on behalf of Watts although he did not seem unduly worried because he did not think 'anyone took any notice of them anyway'.[119] This was possibly a major miscalculation. The 1922 contest was arguably one of the first truly modern general election campaigns in British history. No election had ever been fought with so much advertising. Nationally, 19 million leaflets had been distributed, the Conservative Party alone had put up over 300,000 posters and it was estimated the other parties combined had equalled this.[120] Liberal headquarters had spent nearly £127,000 on the campaign and most of this was allocated to assisting candidates, especially those standing in less hopeful regions so as 'to keep the party fighting along a national front'.[121] As Wilson observes, although the Liberals were not expecting to win office, they 'made a determined effort to re-establish themselves as a major political party'.[122]

The 1922 General Election in Stoke-on-Trent: Summary

The central issue throughout the 1922 general election in all three of the Stoke-on-Trent constituencies was the debate surrounding the programme and policies advocated by the Labour Party. For Labour this meant arguing for the urgency to enact such a programme; for the party's opponents it meant mounting the strongest possible objection to it. From the outset, the Labour Party disassociated itself from

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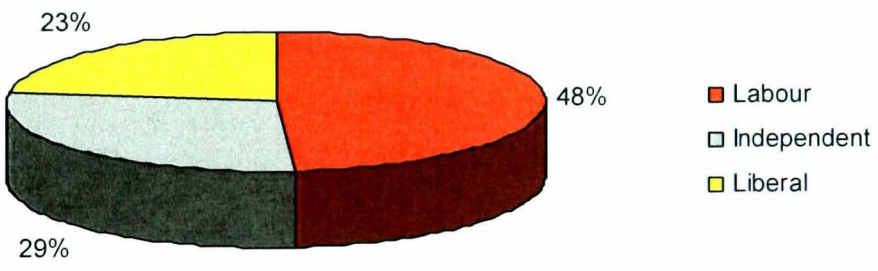
[116] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 31st October, 1922.
[117] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4th November 1922.
[118] Ward was obviously unhappy at the amount of money the Labour Party was spending and even made this an issue on his election platforms highlighting how the party had a total fund of £300,000 (nearly £1000 per candidate); see *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 4th November 1922.
[119] Ibid.
[120] See T. Wilson, *Downfall*, p. 237.
[121] Wilson notes that, of the 325 independent Liberal candidates, nearly 200 received financial assistance from party headquarters see T. Wilson, *Downfall*, p. 237.
[122] Ibid.

extreme socialism presenting itself as a constitutional and reformist political organisation. It did this by emphasising the continuity of its ideology. Consequently, the 'red scare' in this area failed to make a significant impact in the minds of electors. Furthermore, Labour's candidates hardly appeared to be 'frightening'; a man such as Myles Harper-Parker had been known for many years and was perceived to be a respectable pillar of the community recognised for political, trade union and religious work.[123]

The outcome of the 1922 general election was one which contemporary observers found extremely difficult to predict. The *Manchester Guardian* went so far as to depict it as 'the most baffling of modern times' and 'the don't-know-where-we-are election'.[124] As across the country, in Stoke-on-Trent, polling day saw intense press speculation in respect of this most 'baffling' of elections; it was generally considered that the sitting member for Stoke, John Ward, would win comfortably, although even here the impact of a Labour candidate remained an open question.

The 1922 General Election Results in Stoke-on-Trent: Results and Analysis[125]

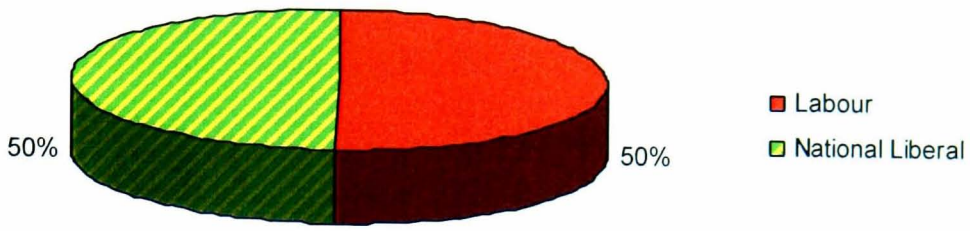
Fig. 3 Hanley (Turnout 67.4%)



10.9% swing Coalition/NDP to Labour

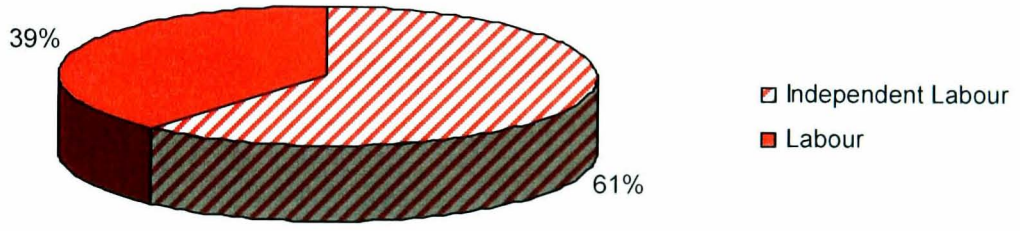
[123] Whilst Maclaren was an outsider he did have some local connection, however, in that he had been close to Hanley's previous member Robert Outhwaite; see, J. Stewart, *Standing for Justice, A Biography of Andrew Maclaren MP* (London, 2001), p. 12.
[124] See *Manchester Guardian*, 15th November, 1922
[125] F. W. S. Craig, *Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1949*, pp. 251-253.

Fig. 4 Burslem (Turnout 78.2%)



Seat uncontested by Liberals in 1922

Fig. 5 Stoke (Turnout 68%)



Seat unopposed in 1918

Capturing Hanley represented a major advance for the Labour Party in the area; in 1912 the party had been humiliated at the by-election (having obtained just over 11% of the vote). Labour's confidence was no doubt strengthened by the fact that the miners' and potters' trade unions had decided to support independent Labour. In his report of the election, this was an aspect the Secretary of the Midland Liberal Federation pinpointed as being of critical importance in determining the results in many areas in the region. He concluded that the election had 'strikingly illustrated the power of the trade unions'.[126] In particular the Miners Federation was identified as having been enormously influential. In particular, the miners' union had put out a

[126] *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 8th December 1922.

circular at the last moment urging members to vote for the Labour Party. It was believed that this changed the course of the campaign in some constituencies; the MLF believed that, in areas where Labour appeared to have no chance at all, they 'secured victory at the last minute' and even where Labour did not win it pushed them into second place, at the expense of Liberal candidates. This was, of course, entirely speculative though the fact that the union had strongly urged members to vote for Labour candidates no doubt did prove to be a strong influencing factor in many areas.

In 1918 the Labour Party had failed to capture Hanley although the party had polled exceptionally well (38.7% of the vote); just 1.7% (of the vote) less than the winning Coalitionist. This had been within the context of a four-way contest in a highly unusual election on a low turnout. As will be discussed below, the Labour Party had made substantial inroads in municipal politics after 1918 and so it was unsurprising that the party entered the 1922 general election with a significant sense of confidence, ambition and optimism. The scale of victory in Hanley, however, was remarkable suggesting a major re-alignment had taken place in the politics and culture of the town; Labour's major 'push' had paid off.[127] Harper-Parker was returned with 48.8% of the vote and a margin of 20.1% over the second placed Independent, the former Coalitionist and sitting member James Seddon, (see fig. 3). For Hanley's new Member of Parliament, the result demonstrated voters 'confidence in the honesty and intentions of the Labour Party'.[128] There seems little reason to doubt this reading but it needs to be set against the backdrop of severe disappointment over the Coalition government's failure to deliver on their promised 'land fit for heroes to live in'. This will be fully discussed below. The Labour Party was also especially advantaged in Hanley in that the candidate, Myles Harper-Parker, was an extremely well-known local figure with a long background in local trade unionism and municipal politics as well as in the religious life of the community. Two other factors were reported also to have reinforced the swing to Labour: ex-servicemen who the local press believed voted en bloc for the party[129] and the Catholic electors were also assumed to be Labour supporters.

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[127] It should be noted that nationally Coalition losses were heaviest to Labour; as Wilson illustrates, a large proportion of Coalition Liberal holdings (won in 1918) had been in industrial districts, see T. Wilson, *Downfall,* p. 236.
[128] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 15th November, 1922.
[129] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 15th November, 1922.

The Labour Party's success in Burslem was equally impressive (see fig. 4). Despite an extremely narrow victory (just 0.8% of the vote) the result was significant because it suggests that Labour had consolidated its position in the division as a party and was now less reliant upon the local personality factor.[130] Andrew MacLaren represented a new kind of Labour candidate in this area; throughout the campaign he was never afraid to express his radicalism. He had denounced war, militarism and ferociously attacked the outgoing government's record; particularly how it had failed to honour its promise of a 'land fit for heroes to live in'. The *Staffordshire Sentinel* did not believe Maclaren's victory had anything to do with his stance on the war; [131] rather it simply represented 'a general desire on the part of the working classes for a better economic position'.[132] The local press was clearly a little unimpressed with Burslem's new member, bemoaning how Samuel Finney (MacLaren's predecessor) had been 'a Labour man with a fine old Liberal flavour' and how unfortunate it was that 'he had been jockeyed out of the candidature by the extremists'.[133] As in Hanley, attention was given to Labour's extremely well organised campaign in contrast to the evident weakness of the National Liberal campaign. Of course, the effect of the party split also impacted upon the Liberal's prospects. It should be remembered, however, that Malkin had been given electoral assistance by the local Conservative organisation; on the platforms and in terms of votes. Although Malkin never defined himself as such, he was perceived to be a National Liberal-Conservative candidate. Clearly, although a combined National Liberal-Conservative 'alliance' posed a considerable challenge to the Labour Party retaining the Burslem constituency it had not been able to capture the seat. Of course, it was probable, if not certain, given Malkin's policy positions, that MacLaren would have captured the radical (or at least, non-National) Liberal vote. His approach would have appeared very attractive to that section of the party. Altogether, considering the previous member's 'Liberal' personal politics and local status, Andrew Maclaren's victory in 1922 represented a significant break from the

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[130] The seat's previous member, Samuel Finney, enjoyed considerable personal appeal. Yet the change of candidate and, as we have seen, a very different style of candidate does not seem to have substantially impacted upon the party's fortunes, in fact, Labour had increased its percentage (from 44.4% in 1918 to 50.4% in 1922) although, of course, this has to be set against the fact that there were only two candidates in 1922 whereas there had been three in 1918.

[131] The *Staffordshire Sentinel* continued to declare the war as 'one of sheer national defence' and, as it had in 1918, took a harsh view of any candidate perceived to be of a vaguely pacifist stance. During the latter stages of the 1922 contest Maclaren had come under increasing criticism of his attitude to the war.

[132] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 15th November, 1922..

[133] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 15th November 1922.

town's Lib-Lab past. As previous analysis within the present study has shown, before 1914, popular working-class Liberalism had remained strong and Labour's development as an independent entity had been significantly retarded by this. By 1922, the experience of war, continued unemployment, fragmenting relations with employers and the perceived weakness of present day Liberalism all contributed to a very different approach to politics. That said, given the low margin between Labour and the National Liberal in Burslem, the Labour Party could not afford to be complacent.

In Stoke, John Ward's personal appeal was perceived to ensure his return yet at nearly 40%, of the vote (see fig. 5) the size of his (official) Labour opponent's poll surprised many. Ward articulated that his return represented a 'victory for sane democracy and constitutional government'[134] but the figures suggested that many of Stoke's electors had become dissatisfied with his style of labour representation and appeared willing to support a party with a more definite programme of economic, industrial and social reform. Given the relatively limited (established) organisation, the Labour Party in Stoke had performed impressively.[135] After the poll, Watts claimed that the Labour Party 'had had to fight several forces- Tory, Liberal and the *Staffordshire Sentinel'*. He argued that Ward had been 'misleadingly reported as a Labour candidate' throughout the election and that the newspaper's coverage of his own campaign had been extremely prejudiced.[136] Indeed, careful reading of the *Staffordshire Sentinel's* reporting would lend support to this assertion. Nonetheless, Watts believed the election had proved to be extremely useful because at least it 'laid the foundations of a working Labour Party in the constituency';[137] with more time and better organisation in the future, the party could and would do better. Indeed, analysis of the 1922 general election in Stoke-on-Trent illustrates effectively that when the Labour Party was properly established in an area (as Burslem demonstrates) the old-style Lib-Labism of the pre-war period was severely challenged and this facilitated a significant re-alignment in party loyalties.

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[134] During his post-declaration speech Ward was booed and was reported to have received a lukewarm reception. Whether some of these protestors may have been Labour Party activists remains an open question.
[135] Labour organisation was weaker in Stoke mainly because the party had never contested the seat before and had undertaken less work in the constituency before the election.
[136] Watts quoted in the *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 15th November, 1922.
[137] Ibid.

Political Re-alignment in Stoke-on-Trent after 1918: Aspects of Political Change

Economic conditions have to be seen as a fundamental context to political change in the period after the First World War. Immediately after the end of war, trade in the pottery industry was buoyant but this was then followed by a sharp decline. As Burchill and Ross's work illustrates, the pottery workers suffered enormously during the early 1920s primarily as a result of substantial wage reductions[138] and from 1922 unemployment within the industry was running at around 13.5%.[139] From this point onwards, unemployment within the pottery industry started to increase well above the national average; by 1926 it reached nearly forty percent.[140] It is possible that North Staffordshire felt the impact of depression more deeply because the area had been relatively stable beforehand although we ought to be cautious not to exaggerate economic prosperity in the Potteries before the war; it was entirely relative of course.[141]

The years immediately following 1918 in Britain had seen rising expectations which during 1920 and 1921 appeared unlikely to be fulfilled. These years had seen unemployment leap to two million[142] and the Coalition may have been increasingly perceived as a conspiracy between employers and the government against the working-classes. The Sankey Report most obviously could have been interpreted in this way. The political impact of this was that, by 1922, this had induced a defensiveness across the labour movement unsurpassed in recent history. It is not hard to imagine why the working-classes in areas such as Stoke-on-Trent might have felt a tremendous sense of betrayal in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. The 1922 general election has to be set against this backdrop of working-class disappointment and anger in connection with a number of issues; lack of extensive social reform, housing, education, the treatment of ex-servicemen, stagnation of industry and the increasingly precarious position of the trade unions (particularly after

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[138] See F. Burchill and R. Ross, *History of the Potters'*, p. 171. Another aspect relevant to consider when examining the attitude of male pottery workers is that female employment had expanded dramatically during the war, see Whipp, *Patterns of Labour,* pp110-16. This may have prompted male pottery workers to view their position as somewhat less secure than previously and serve to encourage more assertive action via, for example, the pottery union.

[139] See R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour,* p171.

[140] F. Burchill and R. Ross, *History of the Potters'*, p. 171.

[141] See F. Burchill and R. Ross, *History of the Potters' Union*, p. 43 and p. 46. Whipp also makes the point that it was only because so many women and children worked, that families in the Potteries were able to overcome poverty; Stoke-on-Trent had the second largest child employment rate in the country (after Lancashire), see R. Whipp, *Patterns of Labour*, pp. 76-77.

[142] This represented 18% of the insured workforce.

the experience of 'black Friday' and the miners' lock-out of the previous year). By the end of 1922 Labour probably appeared to be the only party sincere in its commitment to address these critical issues. The Labour Party had dramatically improved its organisation, was aided by significant union assistance (in Stoke-on-Trent, the Potters' Union and the Miners' Federation) and on the platforms the candidates were extremely capable advocates of policy which demanded working-class attention. In contrast, the Liberal organisation in Stoke-on-Trent was virtually non-existent and the party remained split.[143] Even where the Liberals possessed a gifted and radical candidate (such as Whitehouse in Hanley) it probably seemed to electors that they had just 'stolen' the Labour Party's ideas since it was Labour which was articulating the same policy but on a united and national front.[144] Furthermore, in a period of mounting economic pressure, as one historian has aptly put it, 'no policy was likely to be as electorally effective as an attitude'.[145] The Liberals' stance of impartiality between employers and workers (reflected by the Liberal candidate's approach in Manchester on the issue of the railway strike during the Rusholme by-election) might have appeared far too evasive. In part, these factors contributed to the declining strength of the Liberal Party in Britain's industrial heartlands (such as Stoke-on-Trent). The real point of breakthrough for Labour in parliamentary politics, therefore, was 1922, not 1918 or even during the war and it was inextricably linked to mounting economic crisis and the question of trust as much as it was related to the current political situation (which, of course, it was as well).

The impact of the experience of war upon the political attitudes of both combatants and civilian voters is an aspect of critical importance[146] although it is not an easily discernible one. A number of historians have illustrated how provisions for ex-servicemen, their wives and dependents were not very generous and this in itself may have served to generate considerable dissatisfaction with government and the

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[143] Whitehouse (afterwards) admitted that he had 'lacked proper organisation' and he noted that this contrasted greatly with his Labour opponent

[144] Wilson suggests that dissensions within the Liberal Party hindered it from putting forward a consistent social, economic and industrial programme; see T. Wilson, *Downfall,* p. 217.

[145] M. Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics* (Oxford, 1985), p. 258.

[146] Given difficulties in reaching the service voters and the subsequent low turnout rate in 1918, it is likely to be the case that the significance of changed political allegiance amongst this group was most manifest in 1922.

established parties.[147] The evidence in Stoke-on-Trent supports the contention that discontent on these issues must have remained high after the war and most clearly manifested itself in 1922 at the general election. Throughout the 1922 election campaign in Stoke-on-Trent all parties paid particular attention to addressing the concerns of ex-servicemen yet it appears that the Labour candidates most powerfully articulated this aspect; the key question was who would the ex-service voters trust most? The available evidence suggests that it was the Labour Party.

It has been suggested that after the First World War age became a key determinant in voter allegiance. Again, this appears to be supported by the local evidence. Although anecdotal, in Stoke-on-Trent the press repeatedly reported the relative youth of Labour supporters (these being either supporters attending meetings or information from canvassers). Subsequent studies have concluded that men who had not yet come of political age prior to the war were much more likely to have displayed low levels of identification with the established parties.[148] The generational factor, as with ex-servicemen, appears to be slightly under-recognised within the general historiography (or, at least has been sidelined by discussions of the emergence of class as the principal determinant of voter allegiance). In 1922 the newly enfranchised (including women, other older voters and a large proportion of younger voters) formed 60% of the total electorate and were perceived by party managers and journalists to be volatile because they were 'unattached to any of the great parties.'[149] The established parties (though particularly the Conservatives and in 1922 the National Liberals) feared they might be especially responsive to Labour's appeals and so it was not only an ideological rationale which prompted Labour's opponents to resort to 'red scare' tactics. They were mindful of Labour's potential to make gains amongst the young and particularly amongst returned soldiers. As Stoke-on-Trent illustrates, the strategy spectacularly backfired. Much of Labour's new strength appears to have derived from the newly enfranchised. Younger voters, with little established loyalty to one particular party were most likely to be influenced by immediate events and, of course,

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[147] For examination of aspects relating to the experience of war, conditions and other issues such as pensions for dependents and how the working-classes were responsive to these see J. Winter, *The War and the People* (New Haven and London, 1992), pp. 285-304 and D. Englander and J. Osborne, 'Jack, Tommy and Henry Dubb: the Armed Forces and the Working Class', *Historical Journal*, 21, 2 (1978), pp. 594-601.

[148] See D. Butler & D. Stokes *Political Change in Britain*, (London, 1981), p. 77 and Turner's work which is discussed below.

[149] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 15th November 1922.

those voting for the first time in 1922 had had a traumatic early political education; the experience of war, the failure of the Coalition to fulfil the promises of 1918 and mounting economic insecurity impacted on the young electorate. Whilst older Liberal voters might have remained loyal in their traditional allegiance, younger voters one might presume perceived the Labour Party as the only serious opposition to an established politics that had failed them. Continuing Liberal division aided this process. Childs claims that generational change has to be seen as of critical importance in explaining the rise of Labour.[150] Although largely based on anecdotal evidence, political change in Stoke-on-Trent appears to support this assertion.

Given the predominance of religious nonconformity in North Staffordshire it is also relevant to consider possible changes of allegiance amongst this group after the First World War. Whilst there appears to have been no collapse of nonconformity in the aftermath of war, there was an identifiable political realignment of many nonconformists to Labour's advantage. Many nonconformists who were keen social reformers and had been in opposition to the war transferred to Labour. It should be acknowledged, however, that the most significant shift from Liberal to Labour amongst nonconformists was amongst the working classes.[151] Thus one can assume that in an area such as Stoke-on-Trent which was both largely working-class and predominantly non-conformist this shift, alongside political and economic change was of some considerable relevance. It is interesting to note that all of Labour's four candidates who contested seats in the city in 1918 and 1922 were non-conformists and one of them (John Watts in 1922) even went so far as to express his politics almost exclusively within the context of his nonconformist conscience. As has been seen, it was the Labour Party's candidates who came to embody the political spirit of the nonconformist conscience most explicitly.[152] The numerical decline of nonconformity meant that fewer people were influenced directly by it but we should not overlook the fact that many Labour activists continued to present their politics within the context of

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[150] See M. Childs, 'Labour Grows up: the Electoral System, Political Generations and British Politics 1890-1929', *Twentieth Century British History*, 6, 2, 1995, pp.123-44.

[151] See S. E. Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* p. 234.

[152] Catterall suggests that the Free Church leadership became more circumspect and less exclusively Liberal after 1918 and this had the effect of lessoning the political profile of nonconformity, see ibid. p. 670. This may have been the case, but it did not necessarily follow that the fundamental ideological basis of radical nonconformity did not persist at the grass roots level, even if it might have been less overt. The key point remains that it was most explicitly expressed by the Labour Party and research suggests that the process was complete by 1931 when more nonconformists stood as Labour candidates than as Liberals; see P. Catterall 'Nonconformity and the Labour Party', p. 676.

a nonconformist outlook. It was possibly in producing radical candidates that nonconformity was most significant in the rise of Labour although, as Koss concludes, it could equally be argued that 'socialism found greatest acceptance in areas where its ethic was reinforced by prevailing religious tradition.[153] Analysis of Stoke-on-Trent would tend to lend support to this assertion; the overwhelming majority of Labour activists continued to come from Methodist backgrounds and some interspersed their politics with their religion applying both to the present context of British society.

As has been shown, analysis of electoral politics in Stoke-on-Trent in the aftermath of the First World War reveals that the Labour Party continued to espouse past traditions (progressive Liberalism within the context of the nonconformist conscience) yet at the same time promising a new social and economic order (to some extent based upon Socialist doctrine). This and the forcefulness of its delivery amounted to a powerful appeal. As we have seen, whilst national issues became more important, the candidates' advocacy of policy at the constituency level and the successful application of their programme to local circumstances (together with improvements in local party organisation) was of critical importance in ensuring that by 1922 Labour no longer existed (essentially) as an adjunct of Liberalism with limited appeal as a truly independent entity, but a national party with a positive forward-looking programme with one aim: government itself.

5.3: Municipal Politics in Stoke-on-Trent after 1918

By 1914 the Stoke-on-Trent Town Council comprised 48 Conservative, 35 Liberal and 21 Labour members. With a fifth of the total membership of the council the Labour Party had made significant progress in the municipal politics of Stoke-on-Trent particularly compared to other areas. It should be remembered, however, that like their parliamentary counterparts, many of these Labour representatives tended to be more Liberal in disposition than truly independently-minded 'Labour' men. As in many other parts of the country, prior to the outbreak of war a sizable proportion of Labour's municipal representatives had in essence been, as one historian has expressed, 'sober earnest Liberals'[154]; they were moderates who, in most cases, were

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[153] See S. Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics*, p. 148.
[154] M. Pugh, *Making of Modern British Politics*, p. 122.

barely distinguishable from the Liberals. Given the predominance of Lib-Labism in North Staffordshire it is unsurprising that this was reflected in the municipal politics of the area. Before 1910 the only issue of any real debate had been that of the federation of the six towns which had never been a party political issue; as has already been noted, if anything, examination of the election campaigns and the council records suggest a completely non-partisan municipal politics. After 1918 municipal politics in Stoke-on-Trent changed dramatically and, as in Manchester, not only did Labour's representation change dramatically so did the character of the party's municipal representatives. Municipal politics became more clearly divided along party lines, ultimately, Lib-Labism disappeared completely. There are many factors that facilitated Labour's post-war municipal expansion. Essentially, however, it is arguable that Labour's advance was based largely on the fact that the party appeared to offer a constructive policy programme which was attentive to voters' needs while at the same time the Liberal Party appeared to lack a distinct (and radical) municipal programme. After 1918 the Labour Party was better placed to be taken seriously as a political force in municipal politics and this is very much apparent when evaluating political development in Stoke-on-Trent after 1918.

Electoral Politics at the Municipal Level in Stoke-on-Trent, 1919-1922

The 1919 municipal elections marked a major watershed in the position of the Labour Party in local government. As in Manchester and many other parts of the country, the principal feature of the municipal results in Stoke-on-Trent in the first contests after the war was the significant number of seats captured by the Labour Party.[155] From 21 candidates the Labour Party was successful in 13 wards winning 9 new seats (see appendix figs. 278-298). The principal issues of the 1919 contests in Stoke-on-Trent were housing, health, revision of the Poor Law and, in particular, the proposed municipal purchase of the local tramways (including expansion of the network). The Labour candidates claimed that they were 'not merely pledged as individuals' to pursue improvements but 'as a party... to work for their accomplishment'.[156] During the contests all the Labour candidates campaigned strongly on the necessity of the proposed Tramways scheme[157] whilst their opponents (all standing as Independents)

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[155] The turnout was very low; on aggregate below 50% and in one ward it even went as low as a fifth.
[156] *Staffordshire Sentinel,* 3rd October 1919.
[157] The main aspect of the debate centred on the financing of the tramway scheme and also technical issues surrounding it.

urged against the proposed scheme on the grounds of finance. After the contests, the *Staffordshire Sentinel* believed that Labour had 'gained access to the council chamber....upon the flowing tide that has swept the country generally' and 'had nothing to do' with local issues (i.e. the tramway scheme).[158] Given that this issue had been so central to the campaigns, however, the opinion of the *Staffordshire Sentinel's* might be questioned. The 1919 contests saw Labour's representation on the Stoke-on-Trent Council increase to 38 (out of 104) which represented a net gain of 12.[159] The party itself believed it 'would now have a powerful influence for the cause of progress' on the council.[160]

The extent of the Labour Party's ambitions was apparent the following year (1920) when the party stood 16 candidates (for the 17 contested seats) in Stoke-on-Trent. Like the previous year the central planks of the Labour candidates' campaigns focused on social and economic issues (the poor state of housing, health and conditions across the six towns). The party launched a ferocious assault upon a perceived failure to address the appalling living conditions in the district; referring to conditions in his own ward, one Labour councillor told voters that 'children in such places [were] not born into the world but damned into it'.[161] The same councillor claimed that even though there was considerable discussion of the rates, electors should 'contrast them with the infantile death rate' and then make their decision and he argued that the Labour group would be prepared to 'challenge anyone who advocated the cutting-down of essential services in the borough'.[162] As in other areas, a feature of the 1920 contests in Stoke-on-Trent was the active role played by the recently-formed Ratepayers Association (hereafter RPA) which had emerged as a determined attempt to oppose Labour's proposals to increase the role of the municipal authority.[163] The RPA warned municipal voters against candidates who advocated 'grandiose and experimental schemes'.[164] Of course, across the country, accusations

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[158] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3rd November 1919.
[159] The overall composition was 66 independent (note there was no other party tag specified other than for Labour candidates/ members) and 38 Labour.
[160] See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 13th November 1919.
[161] See speech by E. Hobson in Hanley supporting the candidature of Clowes, *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 29th October 1920. Hobson highlighted how, in his ward of Longton, child death rates were three times greater than other wards in the borough and he declared that if the authority did not attempt to prevent the death of a child then it was 'guilty of manslaughter'.
[162] Ibid.
[163] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6th October 1920.
[164] See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 6th November 1920.

of 'municipal extravagance' and demands for 'municipal economy' became a pronounced feature of municipal politics from the early 1920s and Labour's opponents (often united on this issue) warned of how, should Labour gain overall control, the party would 'put such mad schemes into practice'.[165] The issue of 'municipal economy' perhaps more than anything else served to polarise municipal politics and this was evidently the case in Stoke-on-Trent but the extent to which the issue disadvantaged Labour electorally remained to be seen. The results of the 1920 municipal elections in Stoke-on-Trent saw Labour successful in 5 of the 16 seats the party contested (see appendix figs. 299-314). This amounted to a net loss of one council seat. The 1920 contests thus represented a check to the Labour Party's progress but it was by no means a serious setback.

The 1921 municipal contests in Stoke-on-Trent were again dominated by the 'economy' debate and Labour's opponents adopted an even more vigorous assault upon the party municipal policies than had been the case during the previous two years. One, for example, told electors that 'the anti-Labour party is the only party which has the interests of the whole electorate at heart' and another contended that 'Labour members lacked independence because they were paid for their services by a clique and have an axe to grind'.[166] The non-Labour candidates, of course, placed the need for 'municipal economy' at the forefront of their programmes. The Labour candidates, on the other hand, centred their entire municipal campaign in 1921 on the rating and taxation of land values as a means of raising capital to meet municipal expenditure.[167] They claimed that changes in the rating and taxation of land values would meet the cost of essential services and they also suggested that proper taxation of land values would also force vacant land into use and so could contribute towards alleviating the present housing crisis.[168] The results of the 1921 municipal elections saw the Labour Party capture 6 seats (from 13 candidates) which including unopposed returns represented a net gain of 4 seats on the Town Council (see appendix figs. 315-327).[169] A significant feature of the 1921 contests was the return of a number of leading officials from the Pottery Workers' Society which now had three representatives on the Town Council; its President (W. Aucock), General Secretary

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[165] See *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 7th November 1920.
[166] See speeches by F. W. Dale and W. T. Leason, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 27th October 1921.
[167] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 20th October- 1st November 1921.
[168] See speech by W. H. Beecher, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 27th October 1921.
[169] There were contests in 15 of the 26 wards.

(S. Clowes) and Financial Secretary (A. Hollins). Aucock obtained the largest majority in the 1921 municipal elections in Stoke-on-Trent having obtained 75% of the vote (see appendix fig. 317). As elsewhere, the timing of the general election the 1922 impacted upon the municipal contests in Stoke-on-Trent. In contrast to the previous three years the number of contested seats was dramatically reduced although the Labour Party still managed to put up 8 candidates in the 14 contested seats. The results of the elections saw Labour returned in 4 which (including unopposed returns) represented a net loss of 7 seats for the party (see appendix fig. 328-335).

Trade Unionism, Unemployment and Policy: Aspects of Political Change in Municipal Politics in Stoke-on-Trent, 1919-1922

While Labour remained close to its Liberal traditions (promoting land reform, for instance) the party developed policy which proved to be (to use Tanner's expression) 'relevant and emotive rallying cries' which the wartime experience had made 'just'.[170] Analysis of the municipal elections after 1918 in Stoke-on-Trent reveals that the Labour Party advanced most significantly in wards especially dominated by the pottery industry (in Burslem, Tunstall and Hanley). A major factor underpinning Labour's post-war municipal expansion was that the trade unions had become more firmly committed to the concept of independent labour representation than had ever been the case previously. In Stoke-on-Trent this was especially apparent. In Stoke-on-Trent, the attitude of the pottery unions was of critical importance and in marked contrast to the period before 1914; the National Society of Pottery Workers (NSPW) threw its full weight behind Labour's municipal candidates. Especially important was that a number of the union's leaders stood as candidates; Arthur Hollins (Financial Secretary of the NSPW), for example, stood in Hanley in 1919 on a platform of municipalisation winning with a substantial majority.[171] Hollins had stood against a well-known councillor who had been so sure of his victory he did not even hold any public meetings claiming that electors 'knowledge of his public work' would be enough to ensure his return. As it turned out, this was not the case and Hollins was returned with 60.5% of the vote (and a 21% majority). In relation to the question of 'municipal economy' the Labour candidates stood their ground, as one of the party's candidates made clear; 'whilst conscious of the need for economy we are not prepared

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[170] D. Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 351.
[171] See *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 3rd October 1919.

to sacrifice the health of the people and the lives of the children in the name of economy' and as another articulated; 'there is plenty of money ...it is just not directed to the right things'.[172] Essentially, as the Labour Party saw the issue, 'true economy consisted of the wise spending of money not in the cutting down of expenditure'[173] and this sentiment was consistently re-iterated.

Economic context also has to be seen as being of considerable relevance in relation to the Labour Party's immediate post-war municipal performance in areas such as Stoke-on-Trent; where by 1922 over 16,000 of the local population were unemployed and another 1,000 on short-time work.[174] As in Manchester, the question of the municipal authority's role in attempts to alleviate unemployment became a central feature of debate during the early 1920s and (like Manchester) it was without doubt the Labour group on the council that appeared most attentive to the urgency of the problem. In Stoke-on-Trent the council became exceptionally pro-active in its policy on unemployment relief and proceeded to establish a wide range of relief schemes.[175] Analysis of the council records reveals that overwhelmingly this was in consequence of Labour interjection. Given the current economic climate the council's Finance Committee urged restraint of expenditure on such schemes but Labour–led opposition to abandoning these (as in Manchester) regularly won the argument.[176]

Historians have shown how, across the country, councils with a significant Labour composition developed the most extensive schemes of public works and this contrasted greatly with the 'growing parsimony imposed by the government'.[177] This was clearly the case in Stoke-on-Trent where strategies to address the problem of unemployment were, more often than not, solely in consequence of Labour intervention. The historian can only guess at the possible electoral impact of this

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[172] See speech by W. Aucock, *Staffordshire Sentinel,* 27th October 1921.
[173] See speech by R. G. Wass in ibid.
[174] Figure cited in *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 25th July 1922, see also F. Burchill and R. Ross, *A History of the Potters' Union*, pp. 171- 172. By industry the unemployment figures broke down as follows: 7,864 (pottery), 1,780 (iron and Steel), 1304 (mining) and 4,801 (other).
[175] For a good evaluation of national and local policy towards unemployment see N. Whiteside, *Bad Times: Unemployment in Britain: Unemployment in British Social and Political History* (London, 1991).
[176] See for example, reports of council proceedings, *Staffordshire Sentinel,* 6th January, 24th April and 26th May 1921. Throughout the remainder of 1921 and the whole of 1922 many schemes were put in effect which provided relief for thousands of men at a cost of £162,625, see *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 27th September 1922 which includes a table outlining the breakdown of these schemes.
[177] See N. Whiteside, *Bad Times*, p. 71.

aspect, although it is probably true to suggest that Labour's record on the question of unemployment did not disadvantage the party (especially in wards where unemployment was high and rising).

5.4: Political Re-alignment in Stoke-on-Trent, 1918-1922: Conclusions

The 1918 general election recorded one of the most sweeping victories in British political history. What astonished most Liberals was the *scale* of the Coalition's victory. As the *Liberal Magazine* observed 'everyone knew that the Coalition was bound to win [but] no one expected that the victory would be so overwhelming and complete'.[178] The same publication asserted angrily that the result 'was successful even beyond the expectations of those who devised it' and (understating the situation somewhat) concluded that for the Liberal Party the election created a 'situation of delicacy and difficulty'.[179] The *Manchester Guardian* believed that it simply reflected 'a widespread desire on the part of the electorate to give the government an opportunity of concluding peace and carrying out the work of demobilisation [and] a wave of Conservatism prompted by political events'.[180] Of course, all these statements held a considerable degree of truth. Neither could the Lloyd George factor be underestimated. Particularly, the prime minister's considerable personal appeal helped to secure a sizable percentage of the newly enfranchised female population which, given absentee voters, amounted to well over 50% of the vote in most constituencies.[181] As Cole aptly expressed, Lloyd George had successfully exploited his prestige amongst an 'excited but bewildered public'.[182]

The 1918 general election did not see a national electoral breakthrough for Labour; the party's parliamentary representation had only marginally advanced on its pre-war position. The 1918 general election did, however, see an identifiable change in terms of ambition and a determination to be seen as an independent political organisation with a distinct policy agenda. This was a stark contrast to the period between 1906 and 1914 when the Labour Party found it virtually impossible to appear as anything

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[178] See *Liberal Magazine*, January 1919.
[179] Ibid.
[180] *Manchester Guardian*, 30th December, 1918.
[181] Turner claims that the female vote moved against Labour and so the Representation of the People act amounted to a 'hindrance' for the party, see Turner. J. 'The Labour Vote and the Franchise after 1918: An Investigation of the English Evidence' in P. Diley and D. Hopkin (eds) *History and Computing*, p. 140.
[182] G. D. H. Cole, *History of the Labour Party from 1914* (New York, 1969), p. 86.

other than an adjunct to the Liberals. As we have seen, this had especially been the case in areas such as Stoke-on-Trent. The future of the Progressive Alliance had appeared uncertain in 1914 but it would be unwise to conclude that it had collapsed forever.

After 1918 besides the obvious political situation, issues changed. Issues such as unemployment, organisation of industry, housing, health and pensions became central to the political debate. In the process, they replaced the more traditional issues on which the Edwardian Liberal revival had largely been based. These issues became increasingly relevant to the (expanded) electorate although the Liberal Party simply no longer existed in a form voters perceived capable of carrying through such reform. Arguably, in predominantly working-class areas such as Stoke-on-Trent there existed significant potential for a major Labour advance on the basis of issues and policy alone. Even within the context of the unusual circumstances of the 1918 general election, Labour made a significant advance in Stoke-on-Trent. The party had made a huge leap forward by winning one of the parliamentary seats (Burslem). The real breakthrough, however, came in 1922 when it won another, Hanley; the seat the party had felt so cruelly denied a decade earlier. This represented a major departure in the politics of the Staffordshire Potteries. There did remain some continuity; in Stoke, the old-style Lib-Laber John Ward (now an independent 'Labour' member) could still attract enough support to retain his seat (which he did until 1929) but even he was significantly challenged when faced with official Labour opposition.

As across the country, the effect of war on the Liberal Party in Stoke-on-Trent was crushing. Before 1914 industrial North Staffordshire remained a stronghold of popular working-class Liberalism. It seems particularly poignant that one of the Liberal Party's greatest triumphs in Stoke-on-Trent, the Hanley by-election, which had returned the upcoming radical Robert Outhwaite, proved also to be one of its last. Wilson suggests that in 1922 the Liberals were 'in no position to capture attention by the forcefulness or novelty of their programme'.[183] Analysis of the election campaigns in Stoke-on-Trent after 1918 supports this contention to an extent; in Burslem, as we can see, the National Liberal appeared somewhat old-fashioned and out of touch although in Hanley the Asquithian Liberal was more radical and dynamic. Yet both

[183] T. Wilson, *Downfall*, p. 226.

failed to compete with the Labour candidates economic and social reform programme. As analysis of Manchester has already shown, it seems that the Liberals were doomed whether they were progressive or not and neither did it appear that the amount of work the Liberals put into a constituency campaign made any particular difference to the overall result. As the Secretary of the Midland Liberal Federation concluded; the 1922 general election results illustrated 'very curiously the disparity of reward accruing to efforts put in', as he reported, 'some constituencies which had been ably, persistently and generously worked failed to produce results while others which were poorly organised and worked' did better.[184]

In Stoke-on-Trent, as we have seen, 'red scare' tactics dominated the political debate during the 1922 general election but the Labour Party's candidates remained focused on their own programme and simply rose above the accusations of Bolshevism levied against them.[185] In 1919 the *Manchester Guardian* had written that the 'socialist menace [was a] political bogey by which we decline to be terrified'.[186] Three years later and it seems the greater proportion of Stoke-on-Trent's electors appeared to be of the same mind. Ultimately, the Coalition Government was perceived to have failed the British people in its promise to provide 'a land fit for heroes to live in'; Labour's assault upon this fact was arguably decisive in securing the party's breakthrough at both the parliamentary and municipal level after 1918.

Analysis of Stoke-on-Trent highlights the fragmenting nature of political change during the immediate post-war period. At the parliamentary level 1918 produced no total transference of political allegiance from Liberalism to Labour although the signs of a Labour advance were exceptionally apparent and the Liberals had performed particularly badly. By 1922, mounting economic insecurity, continued division within the Liberal Party and the policy programme of the Labour Party all contributed to a

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[184] *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 8th December 1922.

[185] It has been suggested that the local press after 1918 became increasingly more partisan and at pains to stress the threat of socialism, on this aspect see S. Davies and B. Morley, *County and Borough Elections in England and Wales 1918-1938: A Comparative Analysis*, Volume 2 (Aldershot, 2000). The press in Stoke-on-Trent does not appear to have strongly adopted such an approach; on the contrary, it appeared to be highly supportive of the growth of the Labour Party and had never been hostile. Admittedly, the *Staffordshire Sentinel* may have seemed more supportive of the older style Lib-Labers (and local) Labour men such as Samuel Finney and Myles Harper-Parker than some of the more radical (and non local) men such as Maclaren but it was never overtly hostile. It ought to be remembered that the *Staffordshire Sentinel's* ownership and editorial position remained Liberal throughout the period under discussion here.

[186] *Manchester Guardian*, 8th December, 1919.

shift in popular political affiliations and these factors set the tone of politics in Stoke-on-Trent for the remainder of the twentieth century. The Liberal Party was not wiped out completely in 1918 and, of course, there were considerable regional variations, as evaluation of Manchester demonstrates, however, analysis of Stoke-on-Trent illustrates how the 1918 general election inflicted a blow to Liberalism from which it never fully recovered.[187] One tends to view the decline of the Liberal Party with a large measure of hindsight, however. Had the Liberals been re-united by the 1922 general election and had the party possessed an advanced policy programme equal to that of the Labour Party's, it remains an open question as to whether the disaster of the 1918 general election would have turned into the long-term catastrophe which it proved to be.

Analysis of electoral politics and political change in Stoke-on-Trent has illustrated the difficulties faced by the Labour Party before the outbreak of war in 1914. Afterwards, however, Labour's advance was remarkable. Loyalty to Liberalism across a wide section of the electorate in this part of Britain had remained extremely strong before 1914; local specificity (in particular the predominance of religious nonconformity) and the personal appeal of particular candidates was significant and in the aftermath of war the transfer of allegiance from Liberalism to Labour was dramatic. As this study highlights, explanations for such a political re-alignment must include recognition of both socio-economic and political factors. Analysis of the electoral campaigns in Stoke-on-Trent from 1918 highlights the central importance of issues and policy to Labour's post-war advance. Moreover, it also illustrates that Labour candidates' abilities in articulating the party's programme was also critical to the mobilisation of support and the creation of new allegiances. As this study demonstrates, political events clearly helped the Labour Party expand but, ultimately, we ought to recognise that political allegiances were not simply constructed from above; they had to be harnessed and built upon. Highly emotive issues such as the perceived inequality of sacrifice both during and in the aftermath of war could be used to mobilise political support and as this detailed analysis of the electoral campaigns in

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[187] It ought to be noted that the Liberals did manage to recapture a parliamentary seat in Stoke-on-Trent in 1923 (Burslem) although this was within the context of an election entirely focused on the Free Trade v. Protection issue and which saw the Liberals reinvigorated in various parts of the country. This would prove to be the last occasion on which the party would win parliamentary representation in the locality; the seat was recaptured by Andrew Maclaren in 1924 and held until 1945 at which point he stood as an independent and was defeated by an official Labour candidate.

Stoke-on-Trent demonstrates, the Labour Party did this particularly effectively from 1918.

Chapter 6: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Alliance: Conclusion

The primary objective of this dissertation has been to evaluate electoral politics and political change in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent between 1906 and 1922 with particular reference to the politics of the Progressive Alliance. A number of historians have claimed that the seeds of future Labour growth were already in place before 1914 making the rise of that party 'inevitable' at the expense of the Liberal Party. Heightened class consciousness amongst the industrial working-class, trade union expansion and extension of the parliamentary franchise all supposedly ensured Labour's 'onward march'. Other factors such as an expanding organisation, continuity of leadership and personnel (together with an attractive policy programme) underpinned such an advance. Other historians, however, have contended that before 1914 the Liberal Party remained strong in terms of ideology, organisation and electoral appeal. One of the most forceful advocates of the strength of the Edwardian Liberal revival (Clarke) argued that the Liberal Party had become the most singularly important medium for political change. The period saw the emergence of an advanced ideology (the 'New Liberalism'), the Liberal Party's organisation had been successfully modernised and, perhaps most significantly, the 'challenge' of Labour had been contained.

In certain respects there is something of value in all these propositions but, ultimately, this study of Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent lends support to the view that a natural (or inevitable) Labour advance was by no means assured before 1914; at best the new party's prospects appeared tenuous. Assertions that future Labour growth was 'cemented' prior to the outbreak of war need to be viewed cautiously when one considers electoral politics in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent between 1906 and 1914. In Manchester, although the Labour Party held two of the city's six parliamentary constituencies there are a number of factors which need to be borne in mind. First, Labour's electoral progress at the parliamentary level in Manchester was in consequence of a considerable amount of Liberal assistance. This relates not just to the obvious point that Labour had been given a free-run in these seats but also to the fact that Labour was advantaged by significant Liberal aid during the campaigns and that the fledgling party was elected with Liberal *votes* (i.e. votes from Liberal supporters). The character of Labour's representatives was also relevant in this

respect; neither they nor their policies on the platform were likely to 'alienate' Liberal supporters. Ultimately, the Labour Party had not achieved its parliamentary breakthrough in Manchester entirely on its own accord; it had done so from within the framework of the Progressive Alliance. That the Progressive Alliance in Manchester came under some pressure after 1906 is indisputable, as the three-cornered contest in the South West constituency and a number of confrontations in municipal elections demonstrated. But when the Labour Party did challenge the Liberals it tended to fare very badly. Labour's position (even in the seats which it did hold) was precarious to say the least. This was largely the result of a deeply-embedded popular Conservatism in parts of the city and the fact that some of the issues which had aided Labour in 1906 (as they had the Liberals) had possibly begun to decline in significance. Weak organisation additionally did not help matters.

Tanner has stressed how Labour's early progress was concentrated in areas with relatively high trade union membership and even in these areas there was no uniform swing to the Labour Party before 1914.[1] Analysis of the Labour Party's electoral development before 1914 in Manchester illustrates how Labour's support (within a city) could be highly localised. In Manchester Labour progressed in the more solidly working-class districts where trade union membership was high but elsewhere (as consideration of municipal elections demonstrates) the fledgling party made little identifiable progress. McHugh's contention that the Labour Party's inevitable 'march forward' in Manchester was 'cemented' prior to the outbreak of war appears somewhat misguided.[2] Analysis of municipal electoral development in Manchester shows how the respective parties had developed in such a way that their appeal was spatial. Labour's support was strongest in the 'better' working-class districts; the socially mixed, middle class and business areas remained predominantly Liberal whilst the poorest 'slum' parts of the city continued to be dominated by deeply embedded popular Conservativism. There was little sign of any imminent reconfiguration of this distribution of party support in Manchester. Even in working class districts where one could presume that Labour might be able to make some advance (such as Ardwick) the party's progress remained tentative to say the least.

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[1] See D. Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 398.
[2] See D. McHugh, 'The Labour Party in Manchester and Salford before the First World War: A Case of Unequal Development', *Manchester Region History Review*, 14 (2000) and D. McHugh, 'Labour, the Liberals, and the Progressive Alliance in Manchester, 1900-1914', *Northern History* (2002).

The experience of Stoke-on-Trent also suggests that an 'inevitable' rise of Labour appears to have been unlikely in the foreseeable future. Stoke-on-Trent was an area where Lib-Labism remained especially strong prior to 1914. Even after unions such as the miners had affiliated to the national Labour Party traditional loyalties retained considerable purchase. In the Potteries, there appeared to be relatively little enthusiasm for the idea of independent Labour representation. During the Hanley by-election campaign in 1912 the Labour candidate's sole plank had been that he was better placed to represent such an area because he was a miner and a local man but he failed to convince electors on these points. Hanley voters had decisively not voted for one of their own kind. No doubt this came as a shock to the fledgling Labour Party as well as the miners' leadership and it left them in a quandary as to where to go from there. It could be suggested that over-concentration on the concept of class-representation may not have been so effective in an area that perceived popular Liberalism as an effective representative of working-class interests.

In Stoke-on-Trent the relationship between trade unionism and the expansion of Labour was also more complicated than some interpretations of early twentieth century politics have implied. In general, trade union growth could only aid the development of the Labour Party, although the extent and speed of political realignment across a union's membership could be highly fragmented. While union leaders might have increasingly adopted a more explicit stance on independence, there was no guarantee that the wider membership would follow, in the process abandoning deeply-entrenched party loyalties. Thus in Stoke-on-Trent the miners' union appears to have adopted a more distinct Labour appeal but it seems that the greater majority of the workforce was less certain.

Outwardly it might seem that the Liberals were extremely well positioned in both Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent. In Manchester, the Liberal Party had rarely had such a good electoral position in the city but it is wise to exercise some caution in concluding that this fact supports Clarke's interpretation that the period heralded an altogether more positive era for Liberalism largely based upon the impact of the 'New Liberalism'. Analysis of the parliamentary election campaigns illustrates that the impact of the New Liberalism in Manchester ought not to be exaggerated. Apart from very few exceptions, the Liberal candidates tended to stand on conservative Liberal

platforms, focusing upon the issue of Free Trade at the expense of virtually all other policy discussion. Of the two localities examined here, it was without doubt Stoke-on-Trent which saw a more pronounced radicalism on the election platforms (from either of the left-of-centre parties). Of course, much of this came down to individual candidates and things may have changed but, as it was, Liberalism in Manchester in 1914 remained electorally significant although it did not appear to be ideologically vibrant. This study of the Progressive Alliance in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent has focused principally on policy, political mobilisation and organisation and these, of course, were all of considerable importance in sustaining party support. Specific issues had facilitated the 1906 electoral landslide but once these issues began to loose their political effect the Liberal's overall position (before 1914) could have become less secure if the local party failed to maintain ideological momentum. On the surface it could be interpreted that in Manchester the Liberals did fail to maintain ideological vibrancy. Of course, the Liberal's position in Manchester in relation to policy may have been tactical. It may have been determined that a more radical stance might not be electorally successful in the city. Furthermore, the adoption of too radical an approach might have served to alienate the party's traditional supporters which could have resulted in depleted finances (because of reduced political support) and so impacting detrimentally on the local organisation. The extent to which local policy agendas can ever be perceived to be tactical, genuine (i.e. truly ideologically motivated) or a combination of both is, of course, always a matter of some speculation. But, given that some candidates did adopt a more radical approach it seems unlikely that there existed a completely uniform party line on policy; it seems that candidates were left to determine themselves the key issues upon which they would base their campaigns. Whatever the case, however, in relation to motivations behind policy formation, the fact remains that Liberalism in Manchester remained noticeably traditional. This presents some difficulty for historians who have largely based their conclusions on the post-1906 Liberal revival (and long-term viability of the Liberal Party) as being intrinsically related to the successful permeation and appeal of the 'New Liberalism'.

In Stoke-on-Trent, the Hanley by-election in 1912 could be perceived as evidence that the Liberals had successfully out-manoeuvred Labour ideologically as well as politically. Some historians have claimed that the Labour Party possessed little in the

way of a distinctive policy programme.[3] In Stoke-on-Trent, the 1912 by-election could perhaps be perceived as evidence that politically advanced Liberalism had 'contained' Labour although there are a number of problems with this. First, it cannot be said for certain that the election had been won exclusively on the issue of land reform. This is difficult to fully ascertain. Secondly, it is impossible to say that there was ever a conscious attempt to 'contain' Labour (using policy as a means to this end). Indeed, the Liberal Party had taken a significant gamble at this by-election and, in any case, the radicalism of the candidate did not necessarily reflect the radicalism of the wider membership although it ought to be pointed out that there were few objections locally over Outhwaite's candidature. Nonetheless, the Liberal membership remained mixed and some were more progressive than others. This is what gave the Liberal Party a broad appeal before 1914. During the Hanley by-election in 1912 Outhwaite's presentation of land reform might have struck a chord with sentiments of resentment towards the 'idle' classes and so there may have been a powerful appeal in this sense but an appeal of advanced policy still needs to be viewed within the wider context. The 1912 result reflected traditional allegiances, not in essence new ones encouraged exclusively by a radicalised policy although the latter could consolidate the former (which in Stoke-on-Trent it probably did).

Implicit in the view that the Liberals outmanoeuvred Labour in terms of ideology is the suggestion that Labour's activists for the large part were poor on policy, certainly when contrasted to many of their Liberal counterparts. Admittedly, while Labour's candidate in Hanley in 1912 (Samuel Finney) had clearly been out of his depth on policy other Labour representatives in the area had become exceptionally capable advocates of a radical policy programme. John Ward proved to be a remarkably sophisticated speaker on policy from the very beginning of his career in Stoke-on-Trent and even moderate Lib-Labers like Enoch Edwards by 1910 had developed their approach to policy over just a few years. More importantly, it could be suggested (and this study strongly supports this) that the emerging radicalism of the pre-war years prepared the ground for the more pronounced radicalism of the Labour Party after 1918 (within the movement itself and in relation to its support base).

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[3] Pugh illustrates Liberal and Labour similarity in policy; see M. Pugh, 'Yorkshire and the New Liberalism', pp. D1151-1154.

A number of historians have claimed that consideration of by-election performance provides further evidence of Liberal weakness before 1914.[4] Detailed analysis of the four by-elections which took place in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent between 1908 and 1912 provides little support for this assertion. The first by-election (in Manchester North West) saw Winston Churchill narrowly losing his seat. Given the symbolic nature of defeat in this particular constituency the result might have been perceived to represent a disaster for the Liberal Party. But in reality the result did not represent such a huge reversal in fortune for the Liberals. Admittedly, Churchill's Conservative opponent conducted a broad and intelligent campaign and he astutely avoided the subject of Tariff Reform but the most likely reason why the Liberals lost the seat was simply that electors had reverted back to their traditional allegiances. The party had won the seat in 1906 more or less on the single issue of Free Trade. It would have been more surprising had the Liberals managed to hold it in 1908. In fact one could suggest that the Liberals performed well; the party managed to secure 47% of the vote (only a fraction below the winning Conservative) and yet this was a constituency that had previously been considered virtually unwinnable (the Liberals had not even contested it in either of the 1885 or 1900 general elections). Manchester North-West had become a marginal seat as the two general elections of 1910 testified (the Liberals were returned in each but with slim majorities (obtaining 47% and 48% of the vote).

Poor Liberal by-election performance could also be determined by adverse public reaction to policy or legislation. The two by-elections in Manchester during 1912 represented classic protest votes. The loss of two parliamentary seats in the city during 1912 was clearly unfortunate for the Liberal Party yet it would be unwise to perceive these losses as evidence of a wider long-term decline. As this study illustrates, these two by-election losses were explainable by reference to policy. The flagship Liberal policy of National Insurance was critical to the outcome of both. In South Manchester the clerks and warehousemen strongly objected to the measure since the majority were already in their own insurance schemes while in Manchester North West the commercial and business sector opposed it because of a perceived adverse effect on the industry. The Conservatives obtained a significant electoral advantage from the widespread unpopularity surrounding the Insurance Act and, of

[4] See R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, pp. 82-87.

course, they themselves aided this by conducting an aggressive propaganda campaign against the measure. The Home Rule question also played some part in the results of these by-elections. In North-West Manchester especially the Unionist candidate argued that Home Rule for Ireland would lead to the disintegration of the nation, weaken the empire and have a devastating impact upon trade. No doubt such sentiments also had their effect. In neither of the by-elections had the Unionist candidate made Tariff Reform a key plank of their campaigns; in fact they had virtually avoided it altogether. For the Unionists, the experience of by-elections like these could have served to reinforce the logic that it was wise to adopt a low-key approach to the Tariff Reform issue during elections in areas such as Manchester. This in itself may have had significant consequences for the Liberals since it had been largely on the Tariff Reform issue that the party had managed to secure seats such as Manchester North-West in 1906.

There is another way to interpret the Liberal's by-election losses in Manchester during 1912 however. Closer analysis reveals that, in spite of adverse public reaction to the Insurance Act and the inevitable impact of the Home Rule question, the Liberal vote had, in fact, held together fairly well. In Manchester South the Liberals polled just 4% less than the winning Conservative while in the North-West division this figure was 8% (suggesting that the commercial sector was more hostile to the recent legislation than other groups but also a reflection of some probable anti-Irish sentiment in the district).[5] Both these constituencies had always had an erratic electoral history; party loyalty could never be taken for granted and the Liberal Party itself was appreciative of this fact although the party did not appear to be unduly concerned by the by-election losses believing the outcomes to have been the result of widespread public misunderstanding of recent legislation. The by-elections in Manchester demonstrate the fine line the Liberal Party was treading in its introduction of advanced policy but there is no reason to believe, as some historians suggest, that poor by-election performance during the period was indicative of a more serious (and long-term) deterioration in Liberal fortunes. This study suggests that by-election losses

[5] This was on a relatively low turnout of 81.9%. The turnout rate in Manchester South was slightly higher at 84%.

represented 'temporary trouble' as opposed to anything more serious.[6] Moreover, in consequence of such by-election defeats the Liberals re-doubled their efforts to recapture these seats. This was evidenced in Manchester by the MLF securing the candidature of Sir John Simon for the North-West division for the next general election. Despite being appreciative of the specific reasons for the loss of seats at by-elections, the Liberals were in no sense complacent about future prospects and recognised that the party had to work hard to improve its position in the marginal constituencies.

Some historians have made the logical point that the Progressive Alliance was bound to fail if the Labour Party insisted on encroaching further than the Liberals were willing to concede;[7] both Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent illustrate this particularly effectively. As analysis of these localities shows, the Progressive Alliance did not always run smoothly and appears to have been fragile in both Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent; the consequences in the former proved to be disastrous for both parties since the breakdown of unity gifted a parliamentary seat to the Conservatives (by a mere 1.4% of the votes cast). While in Hanley the Liberals managed to retain the seat though with a substantially reduced majority. Yet, arguably, the Progressive Alliance had always stood on insecure foundations. The extent to which the Labour Party was entirely committed to the idea of electoral 'alliance' with the Liberals always needs to be viewed with a certain amount of caution. Whilst L. T. Hobhouse in 1910 might confidently have written that the Progressive Alliance had produced a 'broader and deeper movement in which the clearer minds recognise below the difference of party names there is a unity of purpose'[8] in reality the politics of the Progressive Alliance were complicated. As early as 1905, Keir Hardie had had no problem in declaring that Labour was 'prepared to fight a Liberal or a Tory government on behalf of the workers' and Henderson intimated that 'if we have a few years of a Liberal government and they do no better than the Tories we will say turn them both out'.[9] Of course, Hardie and Henderson were bound to express such sentiments, but the fact

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[6] This was a term used by the *Manchester Evening News* in its post-results assessment of the 1912 Manchester North-West by-election; see *Manchester Evening News*, 9th August 1912.
[7] See M. Petter, 'The Progressive Alliance' and G. Bernstein, 'Liberalism and the Progressive Alliance'.
[8] L. T Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (London, 2009 edition), p. 226.
[9] Hardie comment cited in *Manchester Guardian*, 6th December 1905 and Henderson quoted in *Manchester Guardian*, 14th November 1905.

remains; for how long the Labour Party would be prepared to continue to exist as the junior partner within the Progressive Alliance remains an open question. Equally, for the Liberals, as Tanner comments, alliance with Labour was ultimately meant to reinforce *their* position.[10] If it failed to do so, the concept of a Progressive Alliance might start to appear altogether less appealing for the Liberals.

Experiences such as the Hanley by-election in 1912 and Manchester South-West in the January 1910 general election can be interpreted in different ways. In Hanley especially the Liberal-Labour alliance had broken down in a particularly explosive manner and recriminations on both sides were an immediate consequence. This might lead one to assume that the Progressive Alliance was, to all intents and purposes, over for ever, yet such an experience could alternatively serve to reinforce the necessity of progressive co-operation. A paradoxical outcome may have been that, in the longer-term, experiences such as these might have served to strengthen the Progressive Alliance since the result emphasised to Labour that independent politics offered little, if any, prospect of success (at least for the foreseeable future). Although the Labour Party was inevitably disappointed by (as they perceived it) their 'treatment' at the hands of the Liberals, in reality, the result provided the party with little alternative other than to co-operate with the Liberals in the future, if they wished to secure the election of parliamentary representatives in these sorts of areas. Furthermore, given that it might have been concluded that electors appeared to favour progressive candidates, the Labour ranks might have simply had to accept the electoral reality i.e. that an appeal exclusively based upon the notion of independent Labour politics (class representation) had very limited popular support. Ultimately, Labour needed Liberal acquiescence more than visa versa.

Some historians have suggested that progressive co-operation at the municipal level supports the assertion that the Progressive Alliance remained strong on the eve of war.[11] In Manchester, while the local Liberal Federation remained anxious (enthusiastic even) to reach an understanding with its progressive ally it appears that the local Labour Party remained generally unresponsive to such overtures. Within the

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[10] D. Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 130. The emphasis is mine.
[11] Tanner (most notably) adopts this position; see D. Tanner, *Political Change*, pp. 154-155, 224-225 and pp. 303-304.

council the Labour group adopted a concerted stance of independence strongly asserting their distinctiveness. In terms of electoral politics, however, despite there being a very slight increase in the numbers of three-cornered contests in the years just before the First World War they remained the exception to the rule. In Manchester, therefore, the Progressive Alliance remained seemingly intact; at the municipal level, there were wards that both parties contested on a regular basis, but there were clearly more wards where the parties appeared prepared to stand aside and give their progressive ally a free-run against the Conservatives. Before 1914, contests between Liberals and Conservatives and Labour and Conservatives were far more common than those between the Liberal and Labour parties.

Other studies have highlighted the complexities of the progressive co-operation at the local level. Both Petter and Bernstein's evaluations of the Progressive Alliance depict a 'fragile alliance' and limited conviction on the part of the Liberals to maintain the policy.[12] Bernstein suggests that especially at the municipal level Labour candidates were more inclined to stand as out-and-out socialists and sought to stress their distinctiveness from the Liberals.[13] He concludes that this was bound to impact on the long-term viability of the Progressive Alliance. It is essential, however, to recognise, that, as McKibbin suggests, the Progressive Alliance was not 'based upon a long-term programmatic affinity'.[14] Historians have perhaps expected too much from the Progressive Alliance. It is probably unrealistic to expect the Progressive Alliance to have manifested in an entirely uniform approach to policy. The evidence in Manchester suggests that, indeed, there existed some pronounced differences of emphasis in respect to policy and that at the municipal level many Labour candidates articulated a more distinctly 'Labour' agenda. But we ought not to perceive this as absolute evidence that the Progressive Alliance was likely to collapse. Whilst it had been specific political issues that created the Progressive Alliance it was political pragmatism which now held it together.

Analysis of Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent before the First World War appears to reflect a pattern illustrated by many other regional studies; where Liberalism was

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[12] See M. Petter, 'Progressive Alliance' and G. Bernstein, 'Liberalism and the Progressive Alliance'.
[13] See G. Bernstein, 'Liberalism and the Progressive Alliance', p. 637.
[14] R. McKibbin, *Parties and People*, p. 3.

electorally strong and embedded within the political culture the Liberal Party appeared reluctant to 'hand over' seats to the Labour Party. This posed obvious problems for the viability of the Progressive Alliance. Had there been a general election in either 1914 or 1915 it was likely that the Labour Party would have contested an increased number of seats. Some of these were bound to have been in constituencies which were held by the Liberal Party. The consequences of the fall of the Progressive Alliance within a peacetime context may have become apparent at such an election. The likely outcome remains purely speculative but it goes without saying that it would have led potentially to a major reconfiguration of British politics. It may be that since it was in neither party's interest to see a split progressive vote the respective organisers would be inclined to resolve matters by amicable agreement, i.e. re-establish a Progressive Alliance. Whatever the case one thing was clear, as McKibbin has recently suggested; the viability of Edwardian politics was entirely dependent upon the survival of the Progressive Alliance.[15]

In his study of North-East politics Purdue shows how an electoral pact between the Liberals and Labour worked imperfectly and Pugh also illustrates how in Yorkshire the Liberal Party continued to be extremely successful in the context of a predominantly working-class electorate.[16] As in Stoke-on-Trent and parts of Manchester, Liberalism remained deeply entrenched within these regions. Pugh's evaluation focuses principally on the constituency of Dewsbury which the Liberal Party held continuously between 1906 and 1914. Labour's share of the vote, however, never amounted to more than 21% and, like Hanley, the party performed badly at a by-election.[17] Pugh observes that across the West Riding mining communities as a whole Labour never managed to poll more than half of the miners' vote.[18] So, like North Staffordshire, Liberalism remained electorally very strong in the region before the outbreak of war. Tanner's study also highlights how any advances made by Labour in Yorkshire (Bradford and Leeds for example) were only in consequence of electoral agreement with the Liberals.[19] Other historians, though, have challenged

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[15] See R. McKibbin, *Parties and People*, p. 32 and P. Clarke, *Lancashire,* pp. 395-399.
[16] See M. Pugh, 'Yorkshire and the New Liberalism'.
[17] The Dewsbury by-election took place in 1908. Labour attained 20.2% of the vote. Compared to Hanley this was much better although Pugh sees it as poor (and illustrative of Labour weakness since it had declined since the general election), see M. Pugh, 'Yorkshire and the New Liberalism', p. D1154
[18] Ibid.
[19] See D. Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 259.

these interpretations, maintaining that the Liberals' electoral support amongst the working-classes was beginning to decline. [20]

Like Pugh and Purdue's research, a number of other studies examining constituency or regional politics in the early twentieth century have also concluded that the Liberals appeared well equipped to withstand the challenge of Labour before 1914. Morgan, for example, contends that in Wales, despite some considerable class-conflict in the industrial sphere, Lib-Labism remained the 'dominant and unifying creed' in the region.[21] Moreover, similar to Stoke-on-Trent and Manchester, Morgan claims that those Labour members who were returned, were 'wholly of the Lib-Lab persuasion' and, significantly, as in Stoke-on-Trent, their appeal emanated from a predominant nonconformist tradition. Morgan suggests, however, that (like Stoke-on-Trent) Liberal-Labour relations were deteriorating by the eve of war. [22] Stead's study of Wales provides further insight into the character of Lib-Lab politics and he shows how the Lib-Labers possessed a highly distinct political outlook. He concludes that they saw themselves essentially as 'direct labour representatives' in a way that, they believed, the LRC could never be; yet by 1914 it appeared that 'the society that had made Lib-Labism was already moving away from it'.[23] Analysis of Stoke-on-Trent after 1900 lends support to the first point; the Lib-Labers did not see their position as resting upon 'labels or argument' because (to use Stead's expression) '*they* were the argument in that they saw themselves as professional representatives of labour' and they became so well entrenched that they became 'great survivors'.[24] In industrial North Staffordshire, where Lib-Labism had become exceptionally pronounced, politicians such as Enoch Edwards and John Ward became remarkably significant political players in the region and this happened very quickly; the key point, however, is that they retained their personal political loyalties and (more significantly) their politics continued to permeate the local culture for some considerable time.[25] The second point, with regards to society moving away from Lib-Labism, however, is less

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[20] See K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour, 1880-1914*, London, 1984 and T. Woodhouse, *Nourishing the Liberty Tree, Liberals and Labour in Leeds, 1880-1914* (Keele 1996).
[21] K. O. Morgan, 'New Liberalism and the Challenge of Labour', p. 172.
[22] See ibid, pp. 172-73.
[23] See P. Stead, 'Establishing a Labour Heartland', pp. 69-72.
[24] Ibid.
[25] This was especially the case with John Ward who effectively persisted as a 'Lib-Laber' long after the phrase (and concept) had disappeared from the national consciousness.

easily applicable to industrial North Staffordshire.

Like Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent, in Scotland, as Fraser's work illustrates, little evidence exists to suggest that the Labour Party was on the verge of making a significant electoral breakthrough.[26] The Scottish coalfields represent a particularly useful region with which to compare industrial North Staffordshire. There were a number of by-elections between 1911 and 1914 which make such comparison especially interesting. Fraser highlights how (as in Stoke-on-Trent) Labour's progress in the Scottish mining districts was sluggish; the party's organisation remained weak and popular support was limited.[27] This was evidenced by poor performance in the four by-elections contested during the period.[28] The first in September 1911 in Kilmarnock saw the Liberals successfully defend the seat; Labour came bottom only managing to obtain 19. % of the vote compared to the Liberals' 48%. What was especially relevant about this election was that the Labour candidate (who was an agent to Keir Hardie's Ayrshire miners) had served on the town council and was widely perceived to be an exceptionally strong candidate. After the election, Fraser notes how the experience led to increasingly embittered relations. Another by-election in Midlothian took place shortly after the Hanley by-election (in September 1912) and it is usually claimed that Labour's actions here were in deliberate reprisal over what had happened in Hanley.[29] On this occasion the Labour Party was extremely astute in selecting a candidate who would be more acceptable to Liberal supporters because, as Fraser notes, he was as 'solid a Liberal as they came'. Furthermore, the candidate demonstrated some astuteness by making land reform the central plank of his campaign. Unlike Hanley and Kilmarnock, however, Labour intervention caused the Liberals to lose the seat (with the Unionists managing to slip in on a tiny minority). This highlighted how Labour intervention could have significant consequences for the

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[26] See W. Hamish Fraser, 'The Labour Party in Scotland' in K. D. Brown, *The First Labour Party*, pp. 52-59.

[27] Some of these areas were very similar to the North Staffordshire Potteries in that the percentage of the miners within the total electorate was roughly the same (20%)) although like North Staffordshire, the miners' wielded exceptional influence on local politics. Religious make-up was also similar in this part of Scotland. These areas have identical patterns of development before and after the war.

[28] The following section is based upon details provided in W. Hamish Fraser, 'The Labour Party in Scotland' in K. D. Brown, *The First Labour* Party, pp. 54-56.

[29] Given the history of this particular constituency, it was perceived to have tremendous symbolic importance for the Liberals, not to mention the fact that the outgoing member was also the Liberal Chief Whip. That Labour chose to contest this seat was quite remarkable.

Liberals in an area perceived to be one of the party's heartlands.[30] Furthermore, if it was the case, like Crewe, that the Labour Party's intervention in Midlothian was in revenge over Hanley, it provides a striking reminder of the damage to Liberal-Labour relations that experience had inflicted. The following two years saw the Liberal and Labour parties in conflict in by-elections in South Lanark and Leith and each of these also illustrated the detrimental impact of the collapse of the Progressive Alliance. Similar to Stoke-on-Trent, therefore, parts of Scotland could be perceived as areas where one might expect to see an identifiable advance of Labour (on the basis of the socio-occupational composition of the electorate) yet this did not happen. But, at the same time, clearly there had developed within the Labour Party an apparent determination for independence which, ultimately, threatened the viability of the policy of the Progressive Alliance and thus the whole stability of the Edwardian political system.

As in many other areas across the country, the First World War had a significant impact on the Liberal Party in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent. In both localities the Liberal Party lost all of its parliamentary representation in the 1918 general election, seeing its share of the vote fall dramatically (the lowest being 20% of the vote in Manchester and 7% in Stoke-on-Trent).[31] In Manchester, the 1918 general election saw a significant swing to the Conservative Party. These results cannot be attributed solely to the operation of the 'coupon', however, since Liberal candidates performed badly irrespective of whether their opponents possessed the 'coupon' or not; the winning (couponed and uncouponed) Unionists in Withington and Exchange were returned with 69% and 70% of the vote respectively (see chapter 4: figures 6 and 7). Analysis of the 1918 general election campaign in Manchester illustrates the general tone of the Liberal candidates in relation to the Coalition and the terms of the peace settlement and it is not hard to see why they would have been severely disadvantaged within a climate of anger, bitterness and considerable confusion just four weeks after the cessation of hostilities. This was the essential context of the 1918 general election. There was clearly some variation in relation to how far individual Liberal candidates

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[30] The previous general elections had seen the Liberals obtaining 60-63% of the vote.

[31] It averaged at around 30% in Manchester, however, and it ought to be noted that the 7% in Stoke-on-Trent was in the context of two Liberal candidates (the de-selected radical Liberal Robert Outhwaite who stood as an independent Liberal) and an official (Asquithian) Liberal, so a truer total Liberal poll was, in fact, 21%.

were prepared to pledge support for the Coalition. A number made it clear that they were unprepared to surrender to (as they perceived it) caucus dictation and they consequently adopted a distinctly anti-Coalition stance on the election platforms. Others remained more cautious. Yet set against the backdrop of an intensely patriotic (and pro-Coalition) campaign by the Conservatives, all Liberal candidates in Manchester in 1918 were likely to have been perceived by the (significantly female) electorate as unpatriotic and anti-government. Furthermore, arguments surrounding the continuation of the Coalition and the coupon tended to dominate the debate on the election platforms for the Liberals throughout the entire campaign but this possibly served to distract attention away from constructive debate on actual issues of post-war reconstruction. Although some Liberals (Butterworth, Stott and Burditt especially) did focus attention to a wider array of issues (in relation to domestic and foreign policy) and appeared progressive they continued to be embroiled in debate surrounding the election itself. Each of these also adopted distinctly anti-conscription platforms which might also have rested uncomfortably within the current climate of public opinion.[32] Though, as this study shows, in Stoke-on-Trent the Labour candidates (and one Liberal) there had also adopted ferociously anti-government and anti-war platforms and yet they polled very well on the basis of such. One cannot conclude, therefore, that such a stance would inevitably alienate voters. The Labour Party's campaign in Manchester in 1918 whilst still focused in many ways on the ethics of the election itself did, however, provide at least a greater degree of attention to practical issues surrounding post-war reconstruction. As the *Manchester Guardian* concluded, Labour stood out as the party with an 'entirely independent standpoint and focused in its future aims'.[33] Moreover, as one Liberal organiser expressed 'the Labour manifesto commanded the attention of Liberal supporters'.[34] In a way, it seems the Liberals satisfied no-one because they were perceived as either too 'left-of-centre' for some (i.e. soft on Germany and dubious in their views on aspects such as conscription) or not radical enough for others. Essentially the Liberal campaign fell flat because it was

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[32] It does not appear to have made a significant difference whether a Liberal candidate was especially anti-Coalition or not. The most vocal anti-government Liberals (in Withington, Exchange and Rusholme received 31%, 30% and 19% of the vote respectively compared to 35%, 30% and 20% in Moss Side, Hulme and Blackley where the Liberals had been greater supporters of the Coalition. Note that the two lowest figures (in Rusholme and Hulme were in the context of multi-party contests.

[33] *Manchester Guardian*, 14th December 1918.

[34] See secretary's report evaluating the 1918 general election, *Midland Liberal Federation Minutes*, 21st march 1919.

neither one thing nor the other, and there was also the added burden of a lack of uniformity across the party in respect to attitudes towards the Coalition and the wider policy agenda.

Before 1914 the Progressive Alliance had been a critical feature of the political system; its collapse heralded an altogether new era in British politics. In Manchester there were 3 three-cornered contests in 1918 which did not bode well for prospects of the re-establishment of the Progressive Alliance. In Rusholme and Hulme the Liberals outpolled Labour opponents by 3% and 17% of the vote respectively while in Blackley the Labour candidate managed to outpoll the Liberals by 5% of the vote (see chapter 4: figures 1-3). The Rusholme result represented a greater disappointment for the Liberals perhaps since this seat was traditional Liberal suburban heartland. It could be suggested that Labour's challenge in a seat such as Rusholme was highly symbolic. The Labour Party possessed no real prospect of capturing the seat (at that stage) but the party's intervention was likely to seriously undermine the Liberal's chances of overtaking the Conservatives. Blackley saw the performance of the two left-of-centre parties more or less equally divided and so, again, demonstrating that the breakdown in progressive co-operation was simply likely to produce a result unfavourable to both parties. In straight fights against the Conservatives the Liberal and Labour candidates averaged at around 30-35% of the vote (although in Clayton Labour polled slightly higher at 38%). Understandably, there were many uncertainties in relation to future political alignments in 1918 but a feature of central importance of the general election was that there had been no immediate transfer of allegiance from the Liberals to Labour in Manchester. Despite what has been mentioned previously in relation to Labour policy in 1918 the party's position had only marginally been improved (in terms of total vote polled). The local party itself bemoaned how 'the working classes had failed to be radicalised by the experience of war'.[35] Yet, this was a little pre-emptive; given the political and electoral context of the 1918 general election it was simply too early to make predictions about future party prospects.

Despite the fact that the Liberals lost all of their parliamentary representation in Manchester in 1918 which could not be viewed as anything other than a disaster, the

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[35] See *Manchester Labour Party Annual Report*, 1918.

party's electoral base had not collapsed completely however, and the low poll was entirely explainable within the context of the current political situation. The party split was not as serious as in other parts of the country and the local organisation appears to have remained robust (if a little strained). The Liberal Party in Manchester knew it would face monumental difficulties over the coming years but it did not believe the damage inflicted at the 1918 general election would be permanent. One local newspaper effectively expressed the prevailing mood within the Liberal ranks when it contended that it would be 'rash in the last degree to take the 1918 general election as providing any trustworthy criteria as to the relationships of parties to the electorate'.[36]

In contrast to Manchester the striking feature of the 1918 general election in Stoke-on-Trent was the advance made by the Labour Party. Stoke-on-Trent saw a significant swing to Labour and given the electoral history of the area the results amounted to a near destruction of the Liberal Party. Of the two contested seats in Stoke-on-Trent in the 1918 general election Labour was returned in one (Burslem) where the party had obtained nearly 45% of the total vote[37] and had come extremely close to capturing the other (Hanley) where it was just 1.7% behind the winning (couponed) Coalitionist. The Liberal vote had plummeted; the party came bottom of the poll in both constituencies (with 18% and 7.3% of the vote in Burslem and Hanley respectively).[38] There were a great many aspects which disadvantaged the Liberals in 1918 and these need little re-iteration but a key question is what factors facilitated such a reversal of fortune for the Labour Party in Stoke-on-Trent in the 1918general election? Careful evaluation of the election campaigns leads one to the conclusion that policy and issues were of critical importance. An obvious feature of the 1918 general election was the sheer forcefulness of the Labour candidates' campaigns. Of course, the Labour candidates were fiercely anti-Coalition and they were vehemently opposed to a vindictive peace settlement but beyond these aspects they campaigned on a forward-looking, constructive, highly emotive, and (most significantly) relevant policy platform. Both candidates were well established local Labour-trade union officials but

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[36] *Oldham Chronicle*, 4th January 1919.
[37] The winning margin over the second placed Coalition Conservative was 7%.
[38] Figures calculated from F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1918-1949*, pp. 253-254. Note that in Hanley the independent Liberal (Outhwaite) who had not been sanctioned by the party obtained 13.6% of the vote thus the true Liberal poll amounted to 20.9%.

that alone is insufficient in explaining their success in 1918. Policy had to be important.

Before the 1922 general election voters in Manchester had two opportunities to express a verdict on the performance of the Coalition Government - one very early (nine months after the 1918 general election) and the other during the later stages of the Coalition's life (in February 1922). The Rusholme by-election in September 1919 provided a striking reminder that the Progressive Alliance in Manchester had been repudiated by the Labour Party. A noticeable feature of the Rusholme by-election was the remarkable similarity of the Liberal and Labour campaigns. Both candidates came from the radical wings of their parties and each articulated exceptionally advanced policy. Both focused attention on a wide array of issues including the necessity for a capital levy, nationalisation (both of which the two candidates supported), the government's flawed foreign policy, profiteering, objection to conscription, land reform and housing. The combined progressive vote at the Rusholme by-election amounted to 50.3% of the total. The Liberals believed that Labour intervention had 'gifted' the seat to the Tories whilst for Labour the result confirmed the party's decision to stand. Perhaps the Liberal candidate's radicalism had alienated some Liberal supporters and they simply abstained (the turnout was in fact relatively low).

The Rusholme by-election confirmed Labour's ambition[39] and demonstrated how far the party had come in terms of policy but most significantly it highlighted the continuing difficulties facing the Liberal Party in Manchester (as indeed nationally). On this occasion it could not be suggested that the Liberals had performed poorly because they were insufficiently radical. Of course, it may have been the opposite yet whatever the case the result in Rusholme served to demonstrate the abyss the Liberal Party was in and in a reversal of pre-war politics it seemed that the position of the Liberals was very much dependent upon the acquiescence of the Labour Party.

The Clayton by-election in February 1922 saw an uncomplicated fight between Labour and the Conservatives. It represented a key test for the Labour Party. Analysis

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[39] Nationally, between 1919 and 1922 there were 81 by-elections and of these 47 saw Labour candidates. Many of those which were uncontested were in rural constituencies; see R. McKibbin, *Evolution*, p. 113.

of this campaign shows how the Labour Party moved in to claim its Liberal inheritance. The Labour candidate (John Sutton) conducted an exceedingly progressive campaign. Moreover, as the *Manchester Guardian* rightly acknowledged, it amounted to a very 'Liberal programme'.[40] Sutton fought a determined campaign focusing attention principally on the failure of the Coalition Government to carry through the promises which had been made in 1918. In particular, he launched a ferocious assault upon the government's policy on education enshrined most clearly within the (recently published) Geddes Report; he argued that this was a blatant attempt to 'rob the children of the war dead'.[41] Sutton provided considerable detail on Labour's 'forward policy' on issues such as housing, pensions and unemployment alongside proposals for a more progressive foreign policy. Sutton himself was an extremely capable advocate of Labour's policy programme; he appeared confident and articulate although at the same time his speeches remained consistently based upon the essential premise that by its policy programme the Coalition Government had betrayed the 'uncounted war dead'. Capturing the seat with a majority of nearly 4,000 (and obtaining 57.1% of the total vote) the Clayton by-election represented a significant victory for Labour in Manchester; the party had virtually doubled its vote since the general election of 1918. For the Manchester Liberals, however, it simply served to demonstrate the need for the two progressive parties to establish 'some sort of accord' since had there been a split vote the seat was likely to have been lost to the Conservatives. At the same time, however, the Liberals in Manchester recognised the chances of this happening were probably limited.

The 1922 general election saw the Liberals reunited in Manchester and outwardly at least the party appeared re-energised and expectations of a recovery were high. Liberal candidates (with a few exceptions) continued to adopt conservative platforms and the majority continued to place Free Trade at the forefront of their campaigns. Historians have acknowledged that the left of the Liberal Party had become weaker in the aftermath of the First World War[42] and detailed examination of Manchester would lend support to this view. On top of this, of course, the Liberal Party remained lumbered with weak national leadership (as well as the continued split). Yet the

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[40] See *Manchester Guardian*, 18th February 1922.
[41] See *Manchester Guardian*, 4th February 1922.
[42] See, for example, D. Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 383 and pp. 377-380.

Liberal Party performed well in the 1922 general election in Manchester. Analysis of the results across the seven constituencies the party contested shows how the Liberal vote had increased significantly since the last general election. Apart from Platting (where the Liberal vote was a disaster) the party saw polls of 49%, 42% and 43% (in Withington, Exchange and Hulme). Of the 4 three-cornered contests the Liberals managed to outpoll Labour their opponents in three of these ((Rusholme, Blackley and Moss Side) although, of course, a split progressive vote simply served to allow the Conservatives to win.

Nationally, the most significant feature of the 1922 general election was the advance made by the Labour Party. In Manchester, Labour saw no real breakthrough; in fact, the results were disappointing for the party; from seven candidates Labour secured the return of just three. Four constituencies saw three-cornered contests and three of these saw Labour placed below the Liberals. Admittedly, two of these were middle-class suburbs and the other was socially mixed so it could be interpreted that Labour had polled relatively well. Though, at the same time (against Conservative opposition) the Labour Party only just managed to hold on to the seats that it already held. Labour's overall parliamentary representation in Manchester did not change in 1922 suggesting that locally the advance of the party had come to a standstill. While the Labour candidates had campaigned on the same principal issues as their counterparts in Stoke-on-Trent (the Capital Levy, unemployment and the housing question) the electoral results were markedly poorer. The immediate post-war period was an equally frustrating one for the Labour Party in municipal politics in Manchester. While the Labour Party expanded rapidly in 1919 (as it did elsewhere) it subsequently found great difficulty in progressing from there. In Manchester the Liberals clearly struggled without the Progressive Alliance whilst at the same time the Labour Party found it impossible to advance on its current position across the city. This contrasted greatly with Stoke-on-Trent, where the Labour Party was able to consolidate its expansion at both the municipal and parliamentary level. Why this might have been the case will be discussed below.

In Stoke-on-Trent the 1922 general election further cemented the 'rise of Labour' in the borough. The Labour Party successfully held Burslem, captured Hanley and

performed exceptionally well in Stoke.[43] All three Labour candidates in 1922 adopted radical policy programmes and were all capable advocates of economic and social reform. Their campaigns focused attention upon a perceived inequality of sacrifice during and since the war and the increasingly illiberal policies of the Coalition Government. As across the country, much of the debate during the 1922 general election in Stoke-on-Trent was focused upon Labour's policy agenda, principally restorative economic justice (the Capital Levy). Throughout the campaign Labour's opponents (with the exception of one Liberal) launched the most vitriolic assault upon Labour and what they perceived to represent 'dangerous socialism'. The Labour candidates held their nerve, however, staunchly defending their and their party's position. As this study shows, the Liberal Party in Stoke-on-Trent emerged from the 1922 general election no better than it had been four years earlier. In Hanley, despite conducting a radical campaign the Liberal candidate came bottom of the poll (below an Independent who was perceived by that time to have become a somewhat eccentric lone political wanderer).[44] Like Manchester, the 1922 general election saw no recovery for the Liberal Party in industrial North Staffordshire.

Historians have interpreted the role of the First World War in the political re-alignment which followed in different ways but there are some common themes. Both Hart and Clarke, for example, have claimed that the post-war shift in political allegiance was deeply connected to the fact that after 1918 the Liberals were no longer 'progressive'.[45] Clarke even went so far as to say that in Lancashire Liberalism could only return MPs on the basis of 'a sort of nonconformist bastard Toryism'.[46] The Liberal Party's astonishing reversal in fortune, of course, did not happen because of policy; it was a product of historical accident (internal disintegration during the war) but although speculative one could suggest that had the Liberals offered a more

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[43] The result in Burslem was extremely close; Labour held the seat with a winning margin of just 0.8% (of the total vote) over the second placed National Liberal. Hanley saw a more convincing victory with Labour capturing the seat with a margin of 20% of the second placed Independent (the sitting member who had stood as a Coalitionist/ NDP in 1918). In Stoke Labour obtained nearly 40% of the vote against firmly entrenched member John Ward who had stood as independent Labour in 1922 within the context of a local Conservative-Liberal pact in his support. With no organisation or established presence (not to mention the near cult-like status locally of Ward) and amidst tremendous press hostility, the Labour Party did extremely well in Stoke.

[44] In Burslem the National Liberal did better obtaining 49.4% of the vote but given that his platform had essentially been a Conservative one it would be wrong to classify him as a Liberal.

[45] See M. Hart, 'Liberals, War and the Franchise', *English Historical* Review, 97 (1982), pp. 820-32.

[46] See P. Clarke, *Lancashire*, p. 397.

relevant, constructive and radical policy programme between 1918 and 1922 the party might have recovered some of the lost ground. As it was, however, in a complete reversal of the pre-war political situation, the Labour Party managed to out-trump the Liberals in terms of policy. Analysis of electoral politics and political change in the localities examined here suggests that the Liberal Party for the most part did not meet the needs of the post-war world. Between 1918 and 1922, on top of factors such as internal division, weak (if barely existent) national leadership and poor organisation the Liberal Party appeared out-of-touch in relation to policy and, ultimately, found it difficult to keep apace with the challenge of Labour. But at the same time even when Liberal candidates did articulate advanced policy they fared badly.[47] There were very few of these, however, and the greater number of Liberal candidates appeared lacklustre and regressive.

Turner's research offers an illuminating insight into how new electors voted in immediate post-war elections (1918/1922) and he concluded that the percentage of new voters in a given constituency made a significant difference, though the results went in a different direction to what historians might expect. His research showed that the greater the number of new voters the less the constituency tended towards Labour; so rather than propelling the Labour Party forward franchise reform proved to be a hindrance.[48] The significant implication of this therefore is that existing (largely trade union based) support continued, in the short-term at least, to form the bedrock of Labour's support and thus, crucially, the party did well in areas where there was already an established 'presence'. One could suggest that this might include an area such as industrial North Staffordshire where the Labour Party already had a strong presence, albeit one which had been within the context of alliance with Liberalism. Issues and policies may have facilitated a smooth transference of allegiance because the Labour Party was not so dissimilar to the Liberals; the party was progressive, reformist and (most importantly) practical in the same way that the Liberals had been.[49] Turner's research also suggests that after 1918 it was within the mining constituencies in particular that the switch to Labour was strongest. This begs the

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[47] This was the case in 1919 at the Rusholme by-election although the fact that there emerged a very public local party debate on whether he was right to pursue such a radical programme possibly led voters to believe the *party* was not fully committed to such reform.

[48] See J. Turner, 'Labour Vote and the Franchise' in *History and Computing* (1997), pp. 136-142.

[49] Tanner places considerable emphasis on the view that the Progressive Alliance disintegrated because Labour finally came into its *Liberal* political inheritance, see D. Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 416.

question as to whether such transference from Liberal to Labour was connected exclusively to the experience of war or whether it could have happened anyway. Clearly, these are extremely important points for consideration. Some historians have suggested that on the basis of the available evidence Labour's prospects in the mining constituencies were already 'reasonably fair' before 1914, not least because the new generation of leaders appeared more committed to Labour and this may have ruptured the traditional allegiance to Liberalism.[50] It ought to be noted, however, that this view has been significantly challenged and as this study illustrates the experience of the Hanley by-election appears to sit uncomfortably with such an assertion.[51] Although it is wise to remember that there were mitigating factors which ought to be borne in mind when reflecting on the Labour poll on that occasion and, of course, Hanley was not in any case an exclusively mining constituency. It is difficult to accurately predict the Labour Party's prospects from that point; they may or may not have improved. Whatever the case, however, Stoke-on-Trent, saw a significant transfer of allegiance from Liberal to Labour from 1918 which reflected a pattern in many other areas of the country (Scotland, Wales and the North-East for example).

In light of Turner's argument it is important to recognise that an essential context for Labour's expansion may have been a change in the allegiance of existing voters. Thus, the suggestion that Labour's developing radicalism before the war may have laid the foundation for the more pronounced radicalism of the post-war years might be of significance. Whatever the case, however, it is imperative to recognise that the post-war re-alignment was not influenced exclusively by new voters with new allegiances but also old voters with transferred allegiances (from Liberal to Labour). When in 1922 new voters with little (if any) 'fixed' political loyalties came into the equation that facilitated an even more spectacular Labour expansion. So, essentially, new male voters in 1922 consolidated Labour's already dramatically improved electoral position in areas such as Stoke-on-Trent. This raises the question as to the precise role of sociological factors in explaining post-war electoral change and ultimately it must be concluded that other aspects must have contributed significantly to political re-alignment in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. The

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[50] See R. Gregory, *Miners and British Politics*, p. 191.
[51] For an alternative perspective on this aspect see, D. Tanner, 'The Labour Party and Electoral Politics in the Coalfields' in A. Campbell, N. Fishman and D. Howell '*Miners, Unions and Politics*' (Aldershot, 1996).

evidence presented within the present study strongly suggests that policy and issues played a critical role in propelling Labour forward as the principal party of the working-classes in Stoke-on-Trent. Of course, elsewhere in the less industrialised parts of Staffordshire the Labour Party's progress remained more fragmented[52] but even so the occupational make-up of the electorate cannot fully explain different political outcomes although, of course, it still needs to be taken into account alongside the impact of immediate political issues. Nonetheless, this study strongly suggests that it is essential not to overlook the power of politics and the way in which political campaigning and organisation influenced, shaped and reconstructed public opinion and in the process encouraged new political allegiances. This underlines the point that overwhelmingly concept-driven (absolute sociological) approaches to electoral politics seem slightly unhelpful if we seek to obtain a fully contextualised understanding of political change in the aftermath of the First World War.

This analysis of Stoke-on-Trent has shown how industrial North Staffordshire was a region where popular working-class Liberalism remained extremely strong before the outbreak of war and even though this was underpinned by a political culture of Lib-Labism the prospect of an imminent and independent Labour breakthrough appeared unlikely. After the war, however, the electoral politics of the region changed dramatically; very quickly Stoke-on-Trent became one of Britain's Labour strongholds whilst the Liberal Party's position had been decimated. Analysis of the electoral campaigns during the 1918 and 1922 general elections suggests that policy and issues were likely to have been of central importance in such a restructuring of party politics in the area.

A significant aspect of McKibbin's argument in his earlier work (*Evolution of the Labour Party*) was that party loyalty was increasingly conditioned by class. Consequently, Labour's advance was based upon a 'slow change in the way political

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[52] Across Staffordshire as a whole the Labour Party performed exceptionally well from 1918. Whilst in predominantly middle-class areas such as Burton and Stone Labour saw little progress, in the rest of the county the party's advance was rapid. In Stafford and Lichfield, while not yet able to capture seats, Labour polled extremely well (obtaining 41% and 47% of the vote in these respectively in 1922) and in the more solidly working class areas such as Cannock and Kingswinford the swing to Labour was as strong as it was in Stoke-on-Trent; both of these constituencies were captured by Labour in 1918 and were subsequently held by the party in 1922.

affiliations were decided'.[53] In Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent the evidence suggests that before 1914 class had yet to become the overriding determinant of political allegiance and clearly traditional loyalties remained strong up to the outbreak of war. Careful examination of electoral politics in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent between 1906 and 1914 tends to lend support to Tanner's contention that, in reality, people were not 'blank slates' and 'existing allegiances could not be ruptured easily [with] a new political culture created overnight'.[54]

From 1918 political events helped Labour expand but we ought not to assume that political allegiances were simply constructed from above. Electoral change was more complex than that. As Tanner comments, 'Labour's [as yet] half-formed breakthrough... had to be built into a firm political platform'.[55] Analysis of Stoke-on-Trent and Manchester suggests that in the former this happened much quicker than in the latter. Manchester saw relatively slow Labour growth when compared to Stoke-on-Trent from 1918. This is perhaps surprising given that before the outbreak of war Stoke-on-Trent appeared to be an area where one would never have predicted an imminent Labour advance whilst in Manchester the Labour Party's position might have appeared slightly more positive (although only just). But, whatever the character of political change, one point ought to be recognised and that is that the political activists in the constituencies contributed greatly to building that platform. To refer back to a statement by Tanner cited earlier within this study; ultimately, the Labour Party 'created its own expansion'.[56] As this study of Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent reflects, the role of policy and the individual politicians' advocacy of the respective party programmes ought to be recognised as being of central importance in electoral politics and in the consequent political outcomes.

In conclusion, this thesis supports the view that the British Liberal Party appeared to remain strong before the outbreak of war in 1914 and, although it might be wise not to overstate the case, it seems unlikely there would be an imminent Labour breakthrough. But much depended on the future of the Progressive Alliance and there were uncertainties in this respect. For how long the Progressive Alliance would

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[53] R. McKibbin, *Evolution,* p. 243.
[54] D. Tanner, *Political Change*, p. 421.
[55] Ibid, p. 124.
[56] D. Tanner, 'Class Voting and Radical Politics', p. 106.

remain a permanent feature on the political landscape remains conjecture, but what is indisputable is that the intervention of a world war served to destroy it and this changed British politics forever. Arguably, political change in Britain after 1900 can be seen to have been largely defined by the rise and fall of the Progressive Alliance.

Appendix: Municipal Election Results, Manchester 1906-1914

1906

Fig. 1 Ardwick

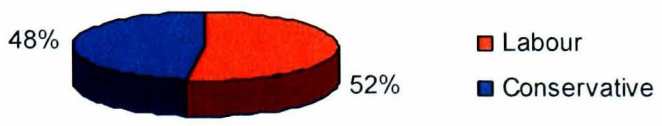

Fig. 2 Cheetham

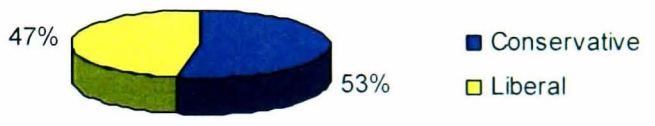

Fig. 3 Harpurhey

Fig. 4 Longsight

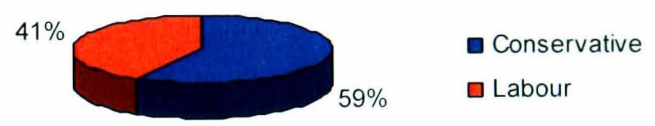

Fig. 5 Medlock Street

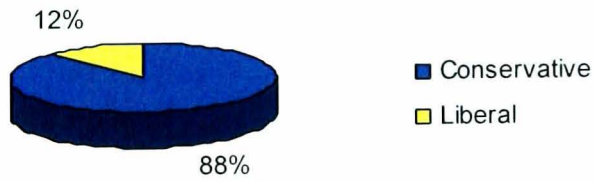

Fig. 6 Miles Platting

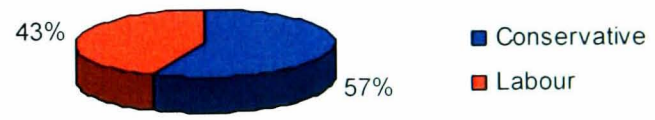

Fig. 7 Moss Side East

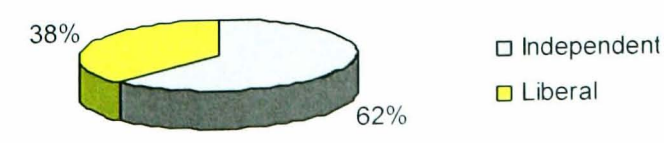

Fig. 8 New Cross

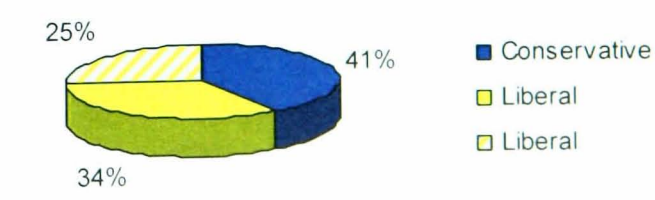

Fig. 9 Newton Heath

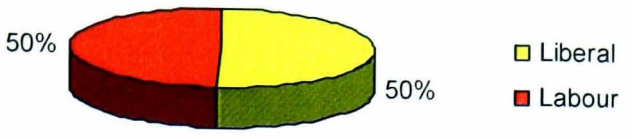

Fig. 10 St. George's

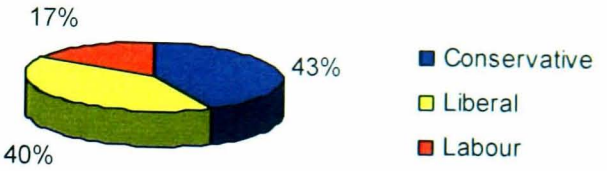

Fig. 11 St. John's

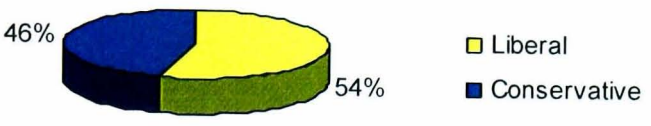

Fig. 12 St. Luke's

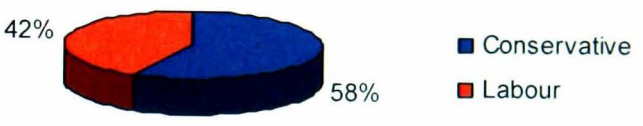

Fig. 13 Withington

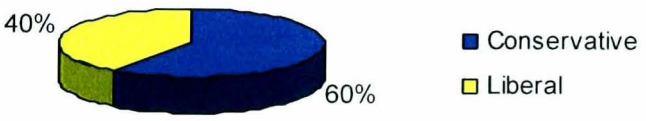

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Fig. 14 All Saints'

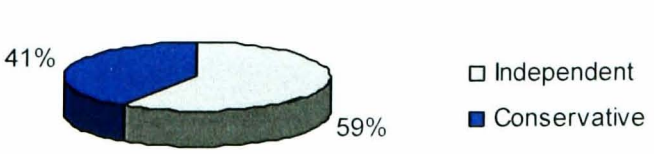

Fig. 15 Ardwick

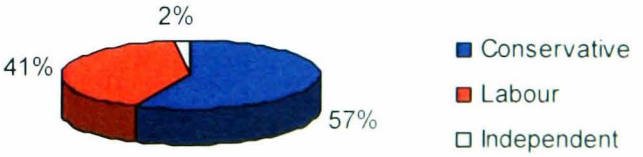

Fig. 16 Chorlton

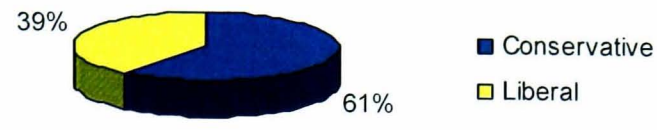

Fig. 17 Exchange

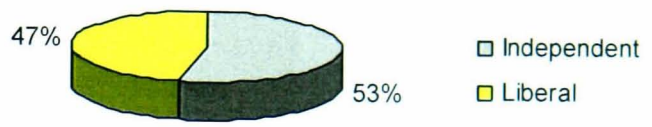

Fig. 18 Harpurhey

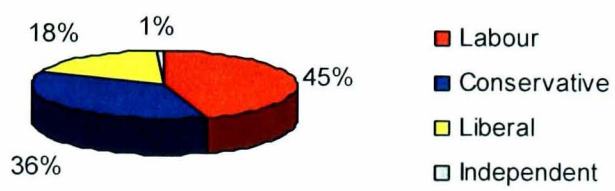

Fig. 19 Longsight

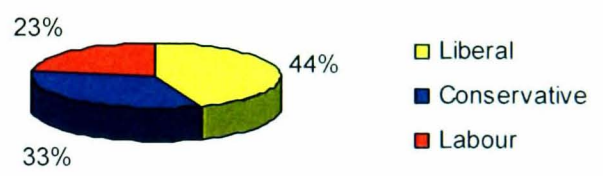

Fig. 20 Moss Side East

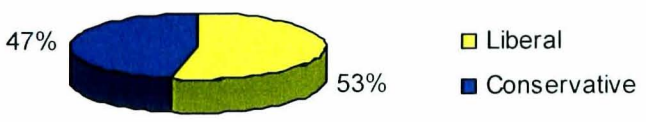

Fig. 21 New Cross

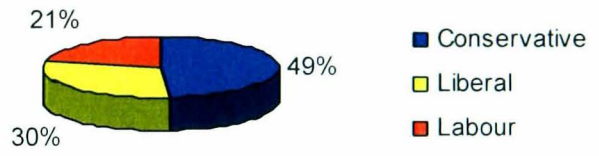

Fig. 22 Newton Heath

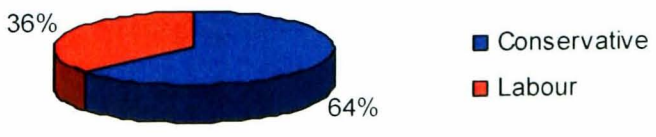

Fig. 23 Openshaw

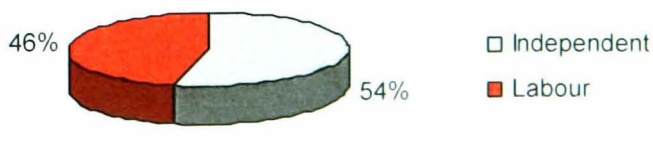

Fig. 24 St. Ann's

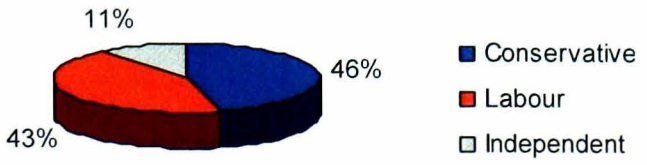

Fig. 25 St. George's

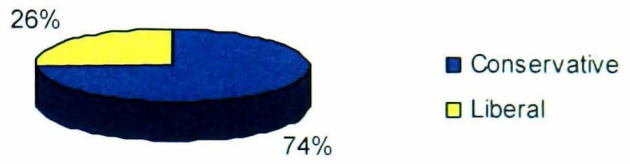

Fig. 26 St. James's

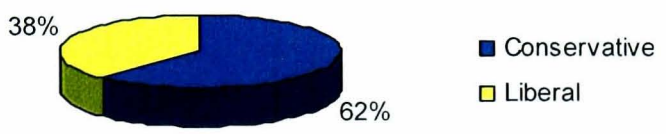

Fig. 27 St. John's

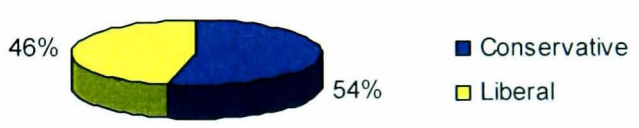

Fig. 28 St. Mark's

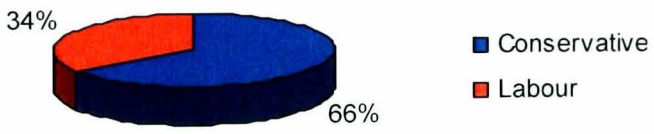

Fig. 29 St. Michael's

Fig. 30 Withington

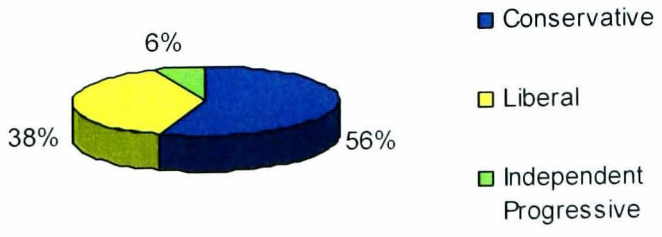

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Fig. 31 Ardwick

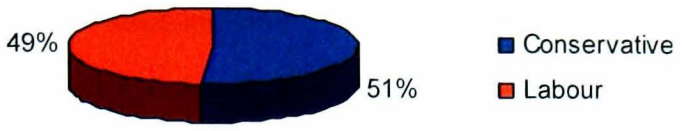

Fig. 32 All Saints'

Fig. 33 Blackley and Moston

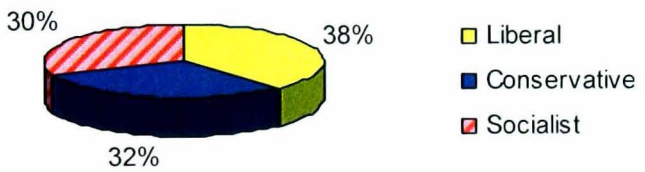

Fig. 34 Bradford

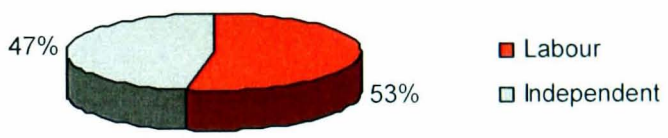

Fig. 35 Cheetham

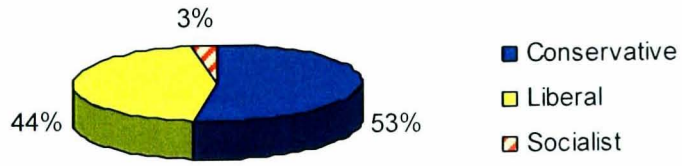

Fig. 36 Didsbury

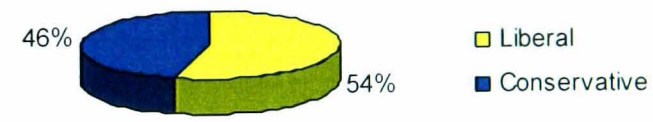

Fig. 37 Exchange

Fig. 38 Harpurhey

Fig. 39 Longsight

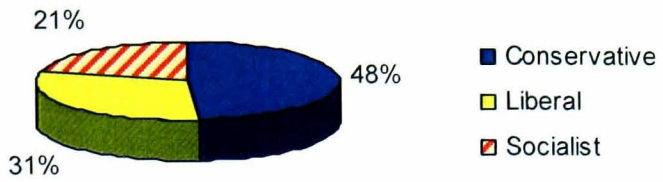

Fig. 40 Medlock Street

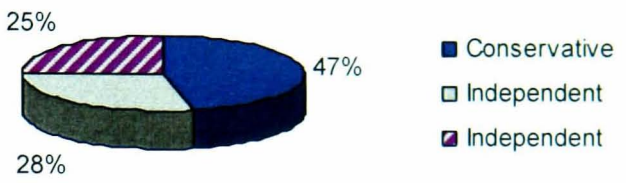

Fig. 41 Miles Platting

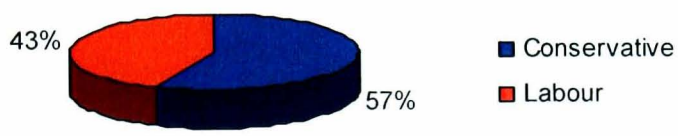

Fig. 42 Moss Side East

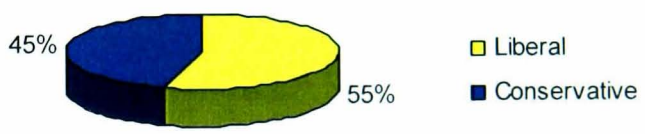

Fig. 43 Moss Side West

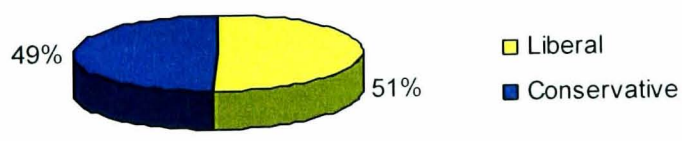

Fig. 44 New Cross

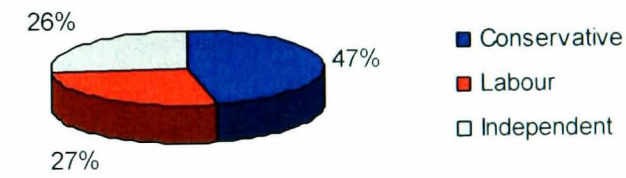

Fig. 45 Newton Heath

Fig. 46 Openshaw

Fig. 47 Oxford

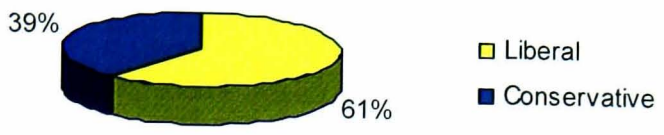

Fig. 48 St. Ann's

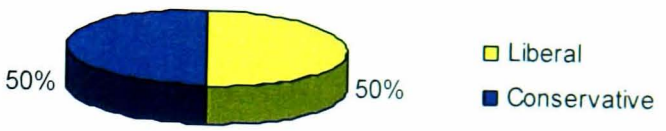

Fig. 49 St. Clement's

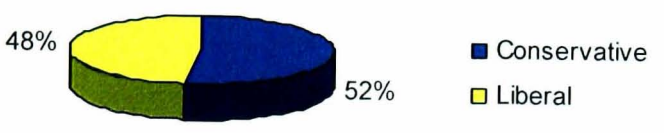

Fig. 50 St. George's

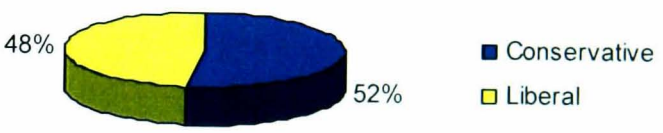

Fig. 51 St. James's

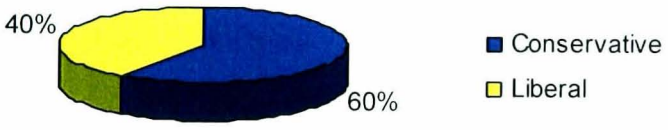

Fig. 52 St. Luke's

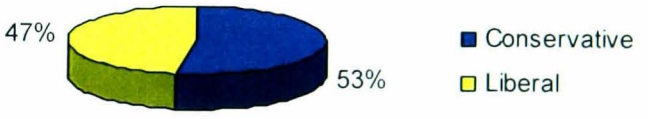

Fig. 53 St. Mark's

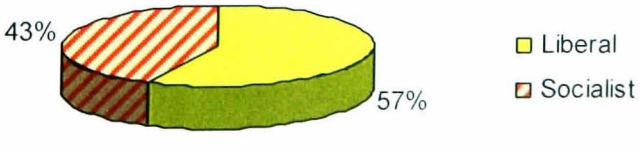

Fig. 54 St. Michael's

Fig. 55 Withington

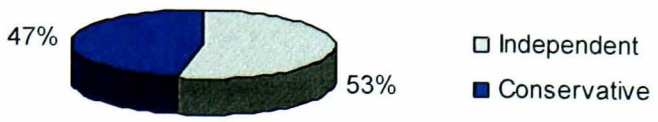

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Fig. 56 All Saints'

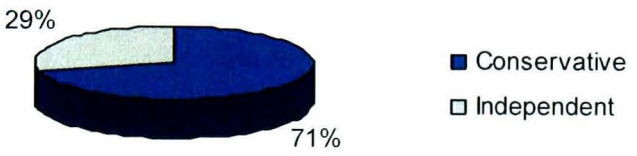

Fig. 57 Ardwick

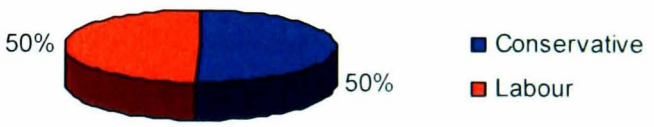

Fig. 58 Blackley and Moston

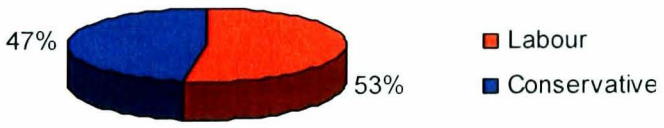

Fig. 59 Cheetham

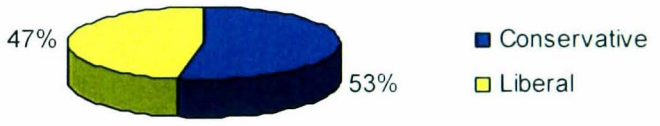

Fig. 60 Collegiate Church

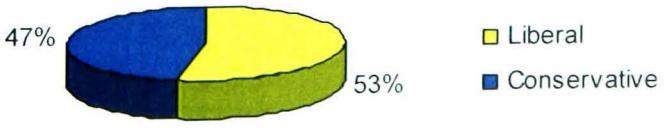

Fig. 61 Crumpsall

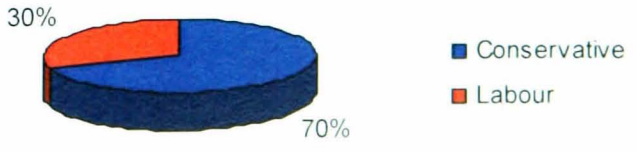

Fig. 62 Didsbury

Fig. 63 Gorton North (Three seats)

Fig. 64 Gorton South (Three seats)

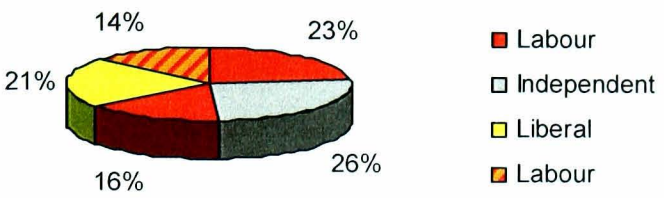

Fig. 65 Harpurhey

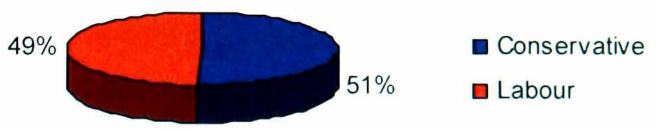

Fig. 66 Levenshulme North (Three seats)

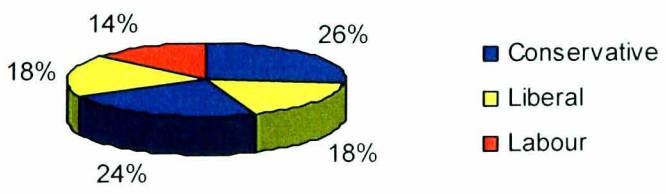

Fig. 67 Levenshulme South (Three seats)

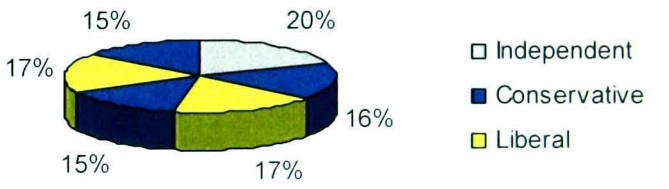

Fig. 68 Longsight

Fig. 69 Medlock Street

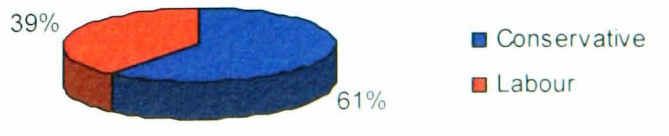

Fig. 70 Miles Platting

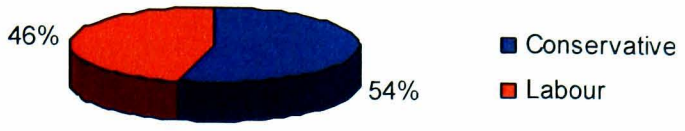

Fig. 71 Moss Side East

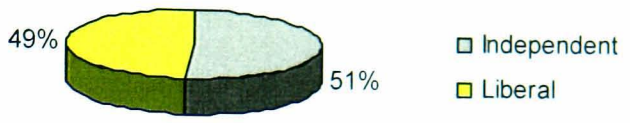

Fig. 72 New Cross (Two seats)

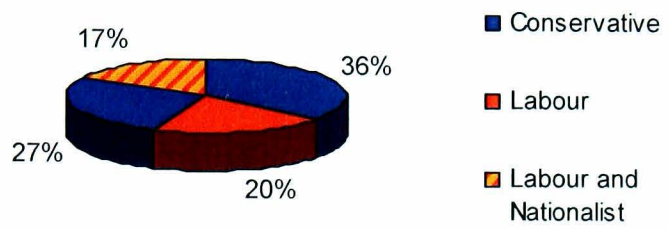

Fig. 73 Openshaw

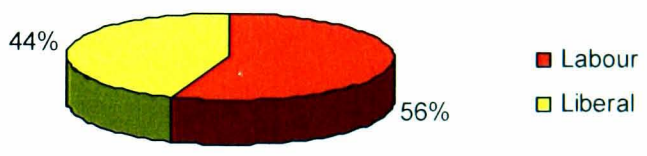

Fig. 74 Rusholme

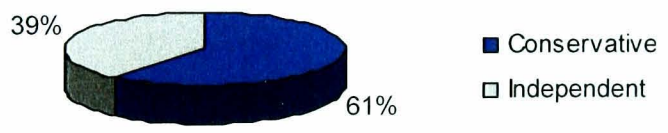

Fig. 75 St. Ann's

Fig. 76 St. George's

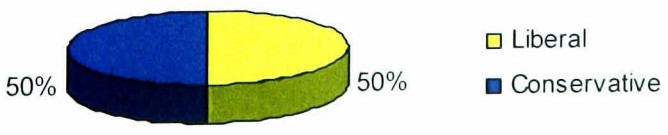

Fig. 77 St. John's

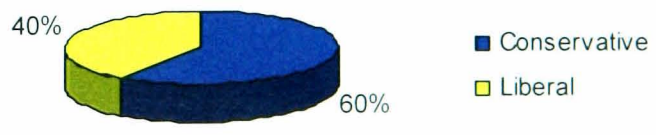

Fig. 78 St. Luke's

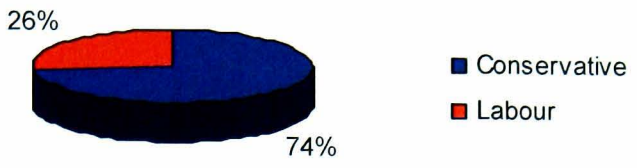

Fig. 79 St. Mark's

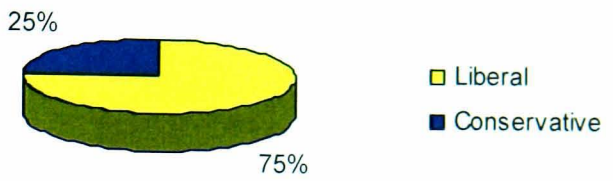

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Fig. 80 All Saints'

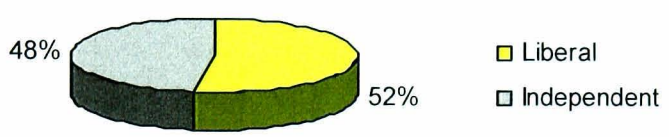

Fig. 81 Ardwick

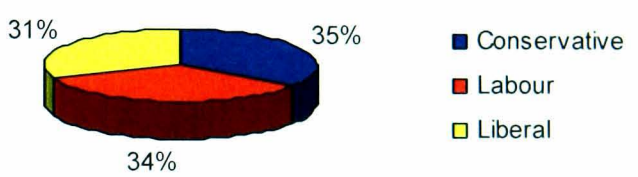

Fig. 82 Blackley and Moston

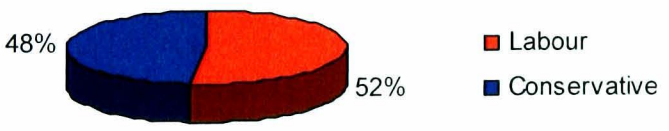

Fig. 83 Bradford

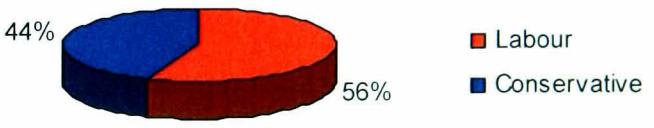

Fig. 84 Crumpsall

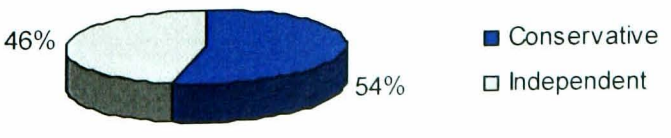

Fig. 85 Exchange

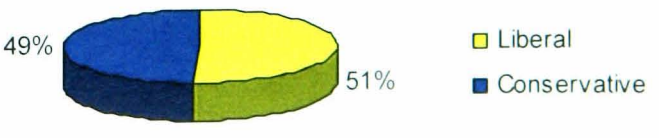

Fig. 86 Gorton North

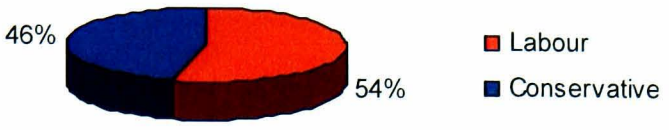

Fig. 87 Gorton South

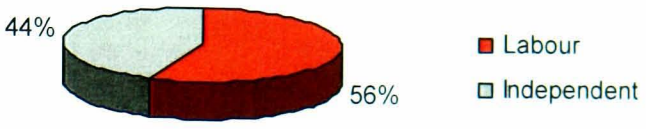

Fig. 88 Harpurhey

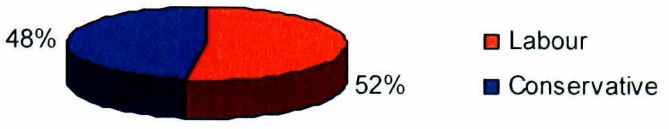

Fig. 89 Levenshulme North

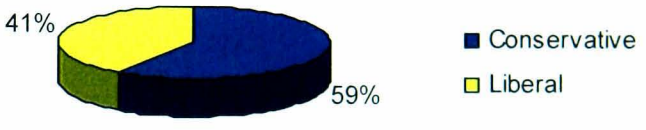

Fig. 90 Levenshulme South

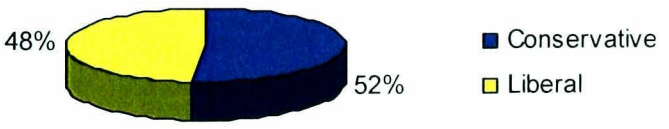

Fig. 91 Longsight

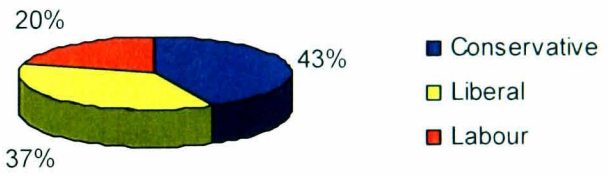

Fig. 92 Medlock Street

Fig. 93 Miles Platting

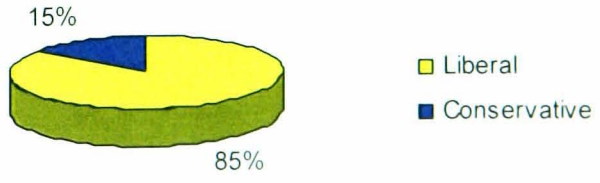

Fig. 94 Moss Side East

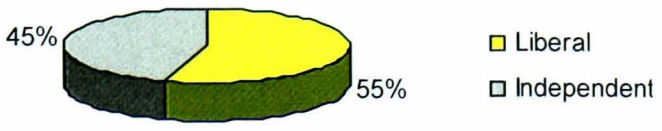

Fig. 95 New Cross (Two seats)

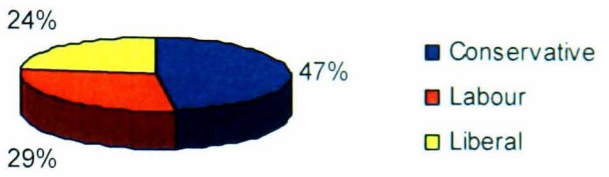

Fig. 96 Openshaw

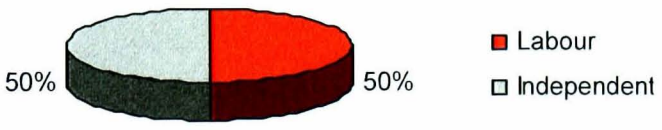

Fig. 97 Rusholme

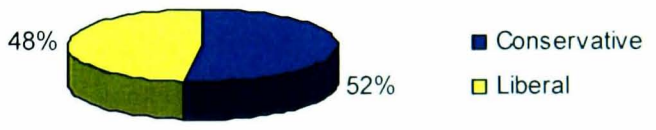

Fig. 98 St. Clement's

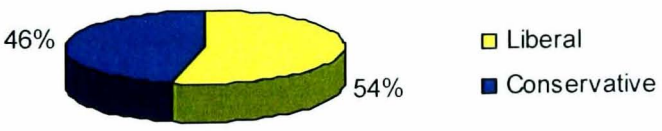

Fig. 99 St. George's

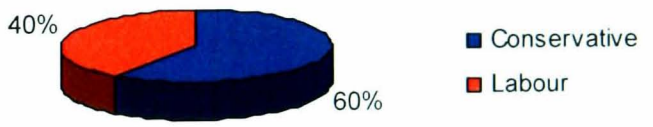

Fig. 100 St. James's

Fig. 101 St. John's

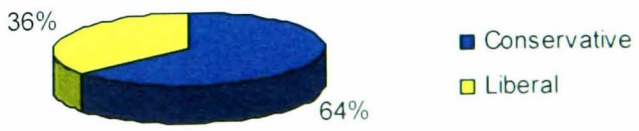

Fig. 102 St. Luke's

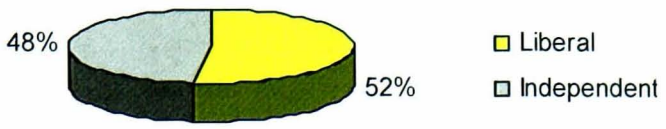

Fig. 103 St. Michael's

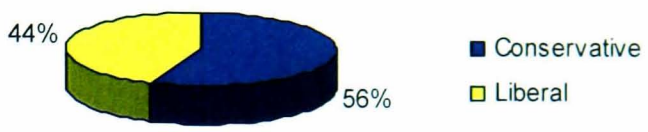

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Fig. 104 Ardwick

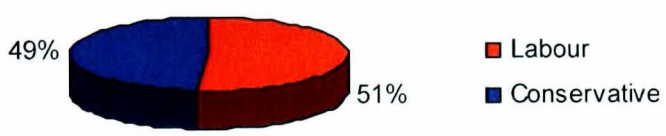

Fig. 105 Blackley and Moston

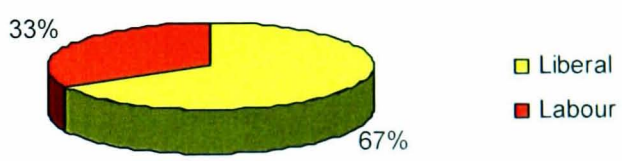

Fig. 106 Bradford

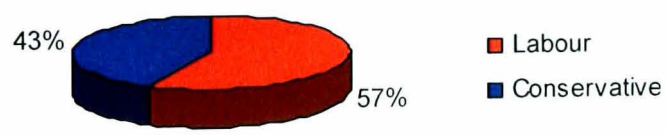

Fig. 107 Cheetham

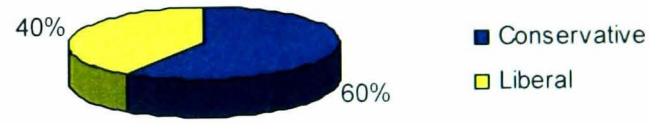

Fig. 108 Chorlton-cum-Hardy

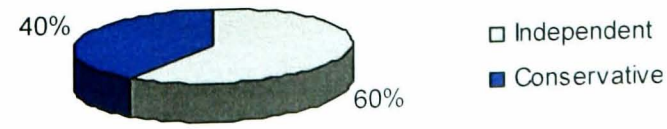

Fig. 109 Crumpsall

Fig. 110 Didsbury

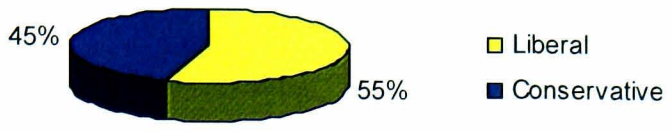

Fig. 111 Exchange

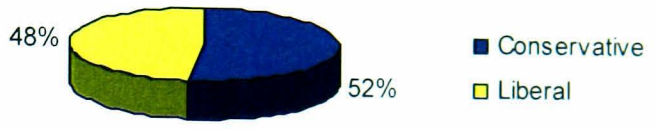

Fig. 112 Gorton North

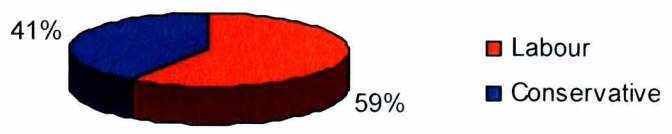

Fig. 113 Gorton South

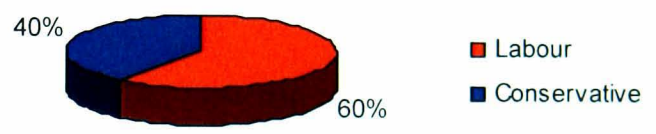

Fig. 114 Harpurhey

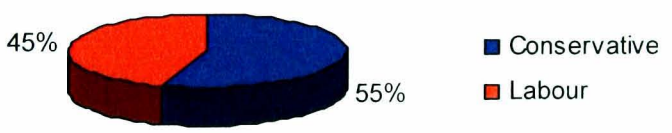

Fig. 115 Levenshulme North

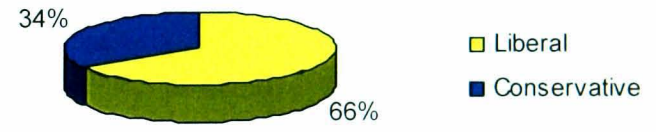

Fig. 116 Levenshulme South

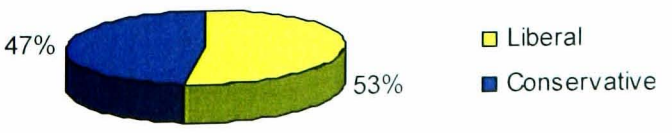

Fig. 117 Longsight

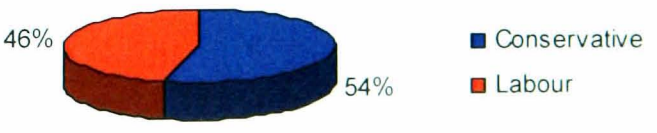

Fig. 118 Medlock Street

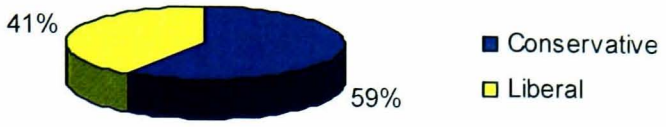

Fig. 119 Miles Platting

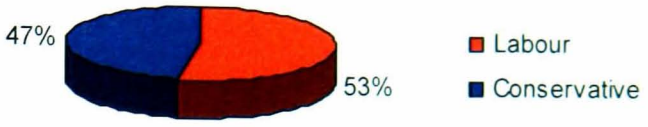

Fig. 120 Moss Side East

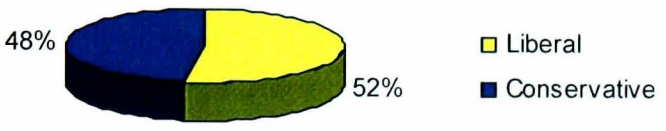

Fig. 121 Moss Side West

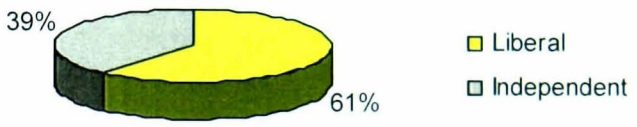

Fig. 122 New Cross (Two seats)

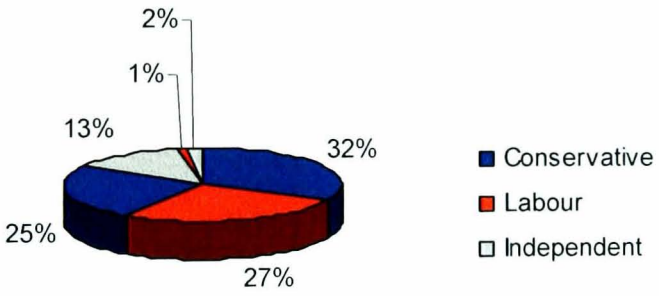

Fig. 123 Newton Heath

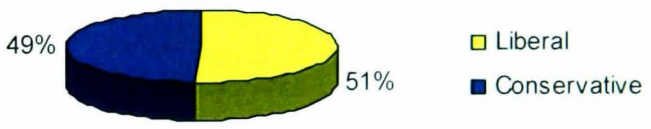

Fig. 124 Openshaw

Fig. 125 Oxford

Fig. 126 St. Ann's

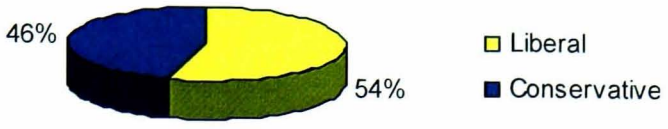

Fig. 127 St. Clement's

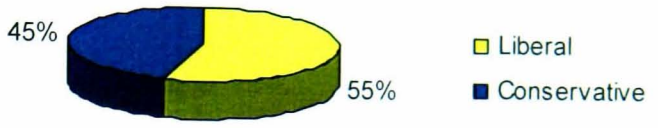

Fig. 128 St. John's

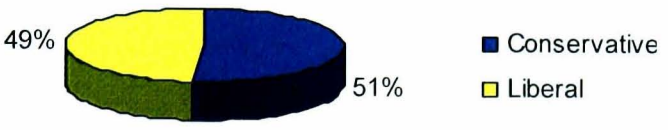

Fig. 129 St. Luke's

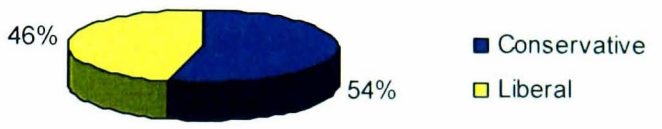

Fig. 130 St. Mark's

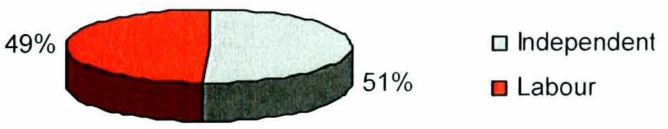

Fig. 131 St. Michael's

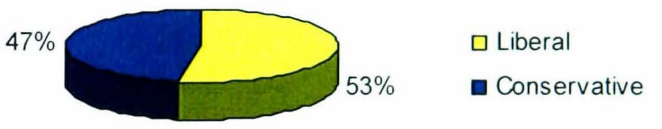

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Fig. 132 Ardwick

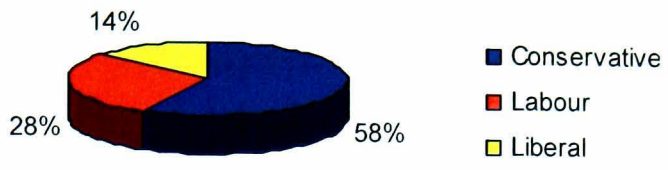

Fig. 133 Blackley and Moston

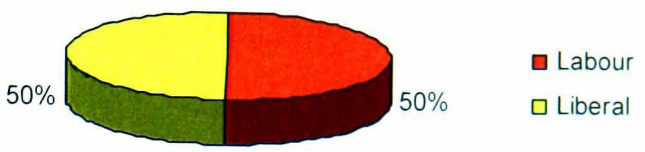

Fig. 134 Bradford

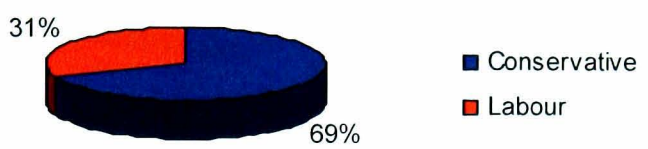

Fig. 135 Chorlton-cum-Hardy

Fig. 136 Collegiate Church

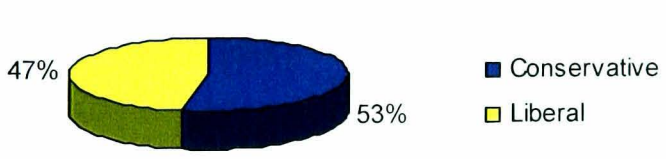

Fig. 137 Harpurhey

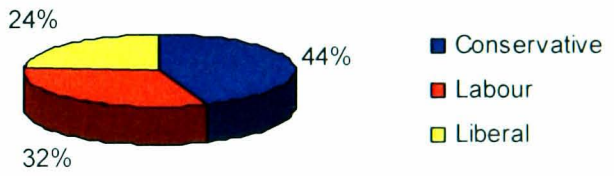

Fig. 138 Longsight

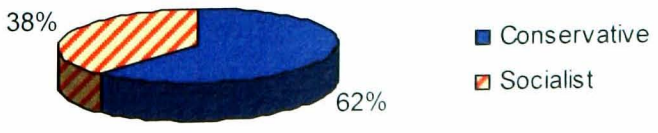

Fig. 139 Miles Platting

Fig. 140 Moss Side East

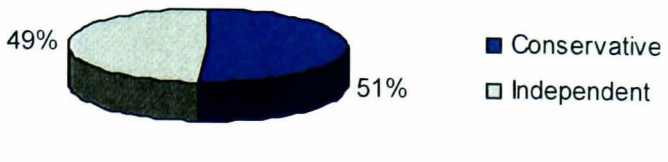

Fig. 141 New Cross

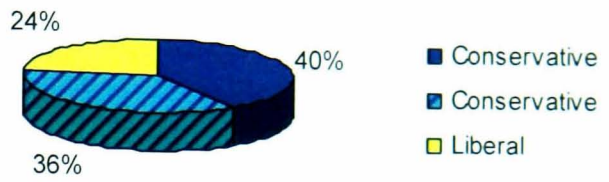

Fig. 142 Newton Heath

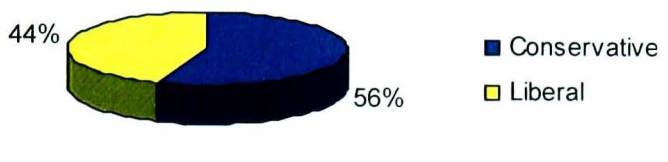

Fig. 143 Openshaw

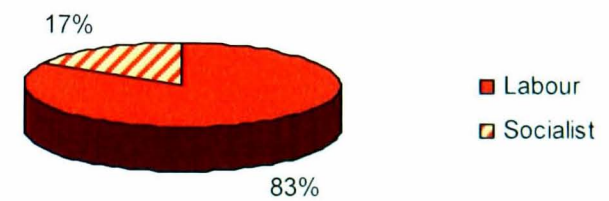

Fig. 144 St. Clement's

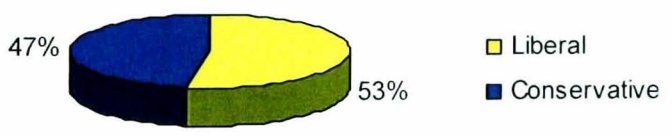

Fig. 145 St. George's

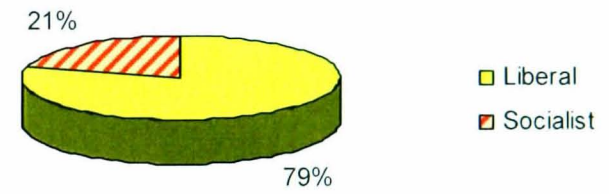

Fig. 146 St. James's

Fig. 147 St. John's

Fig. 148 St. Michael's

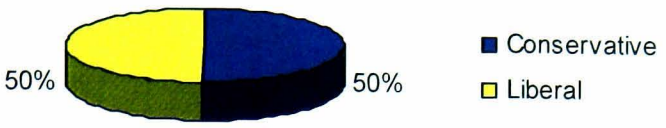

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Fig. 149 All Saints'

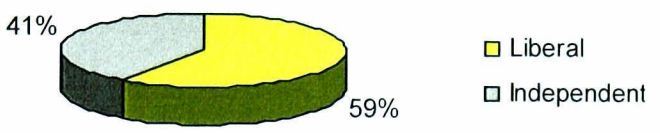

Fig. 150 Blackley and Moston

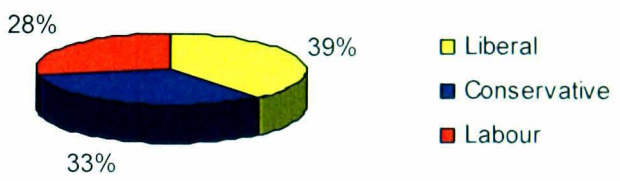

Fig. 151 Collegiate Church

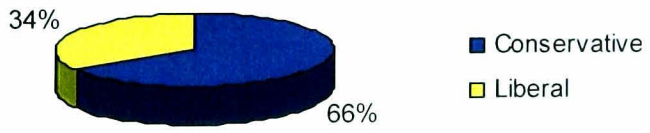

Fig. 152 Didsbury

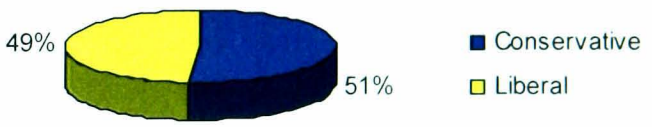

Fig. 153 Gorton North

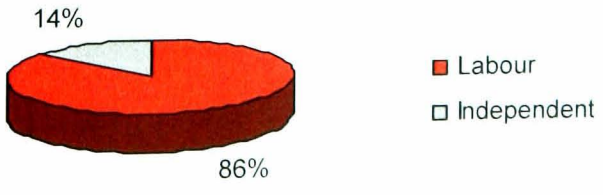

Fig. 154 Gorton South

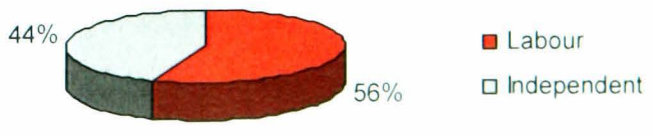

Fig. 155 Longsight

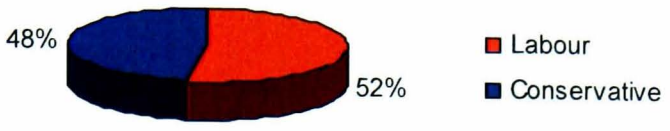

Fig. 156 Medlock Street

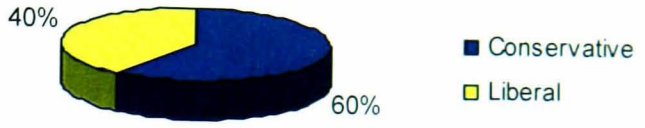

Fig. 157 Moss Side East

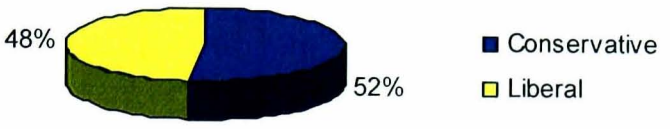

Fig. 158 Moss Side West

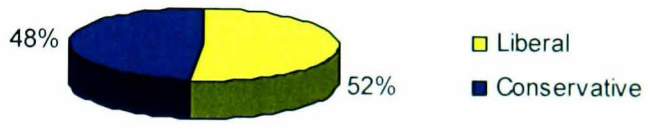

Fig. 159 New Cross (Two seats)

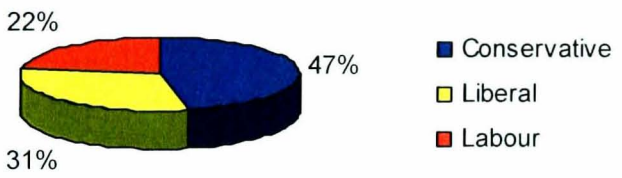

Fig. 160 Openshaw

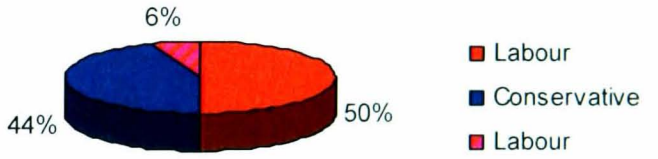

Fig. 161 St. Ann's

Fig. 162 St. George's

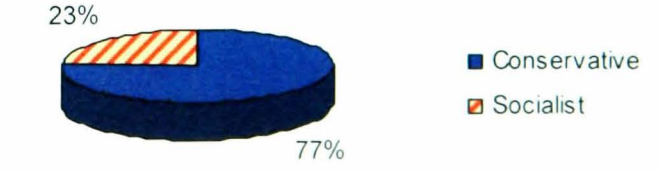

Fig. 163 St. James's

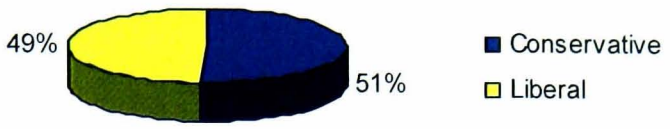

Fig. 164 St. Luke's

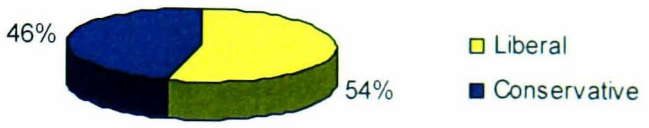

Fig. 165 St. Mark's

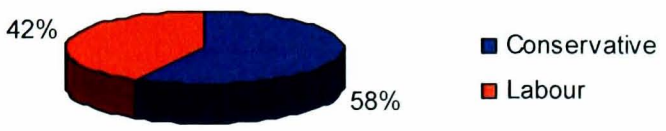

Fig. 166 St. Michael's

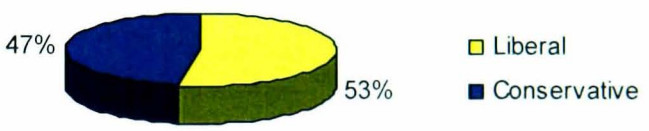

Fig. 167 Withington

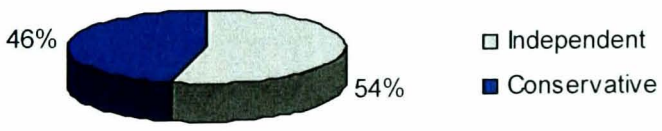

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Fig. 168 All Saints'

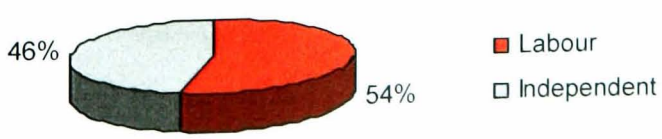


Fig. 169 Ardwick

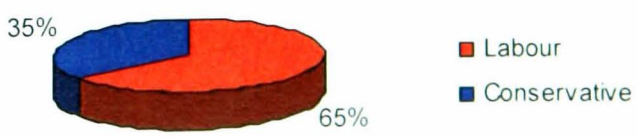


Fig. 170 Beswick (Three seats)

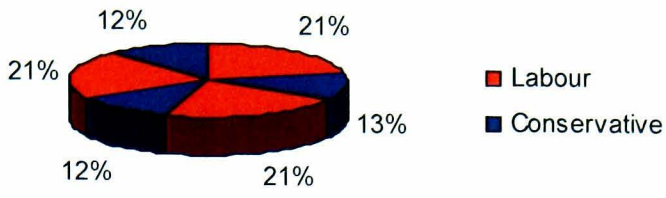


Fig. 171 Blackley (Three seats)

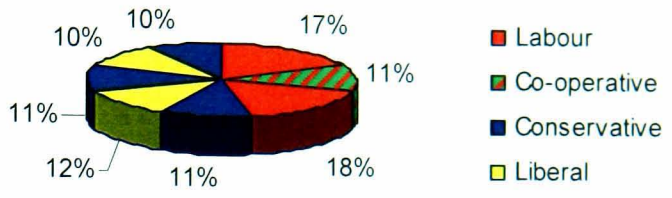


Fig. 172 Bradford

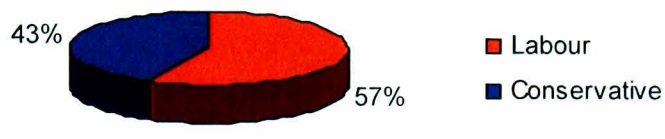


Fig. 173 Chorlton-cum-Hardy

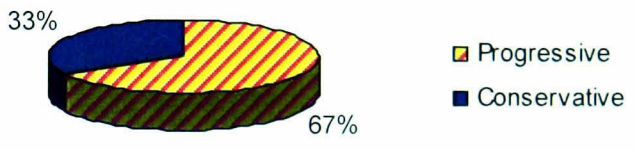


Fig. 174 Collegiate Church

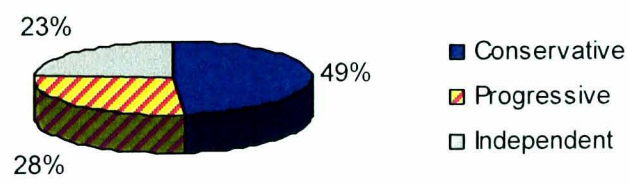


Fig. 175 Collyhurst (Three seats)

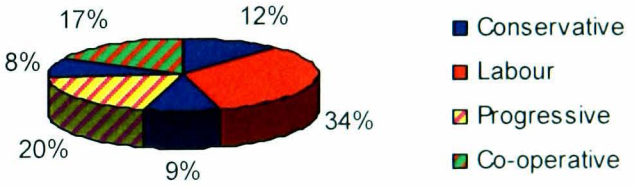


Fig. 176 Exchange

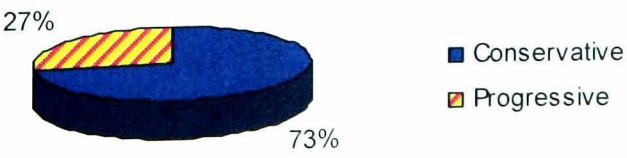


Fig. 177 Gorton North

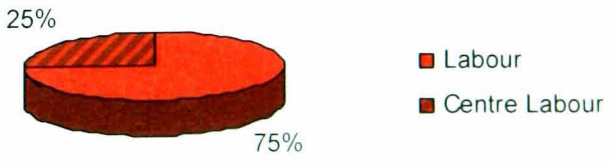


Fig. 178 Gorton South

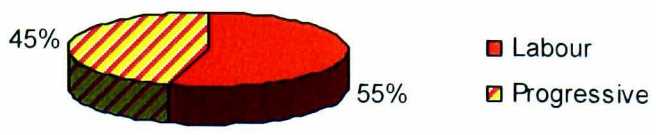


Fig. 179 Harpurhey

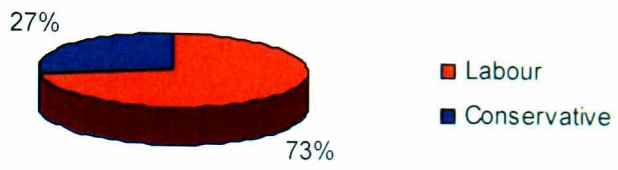


Fig. 180 Levenshulme (Three seats)

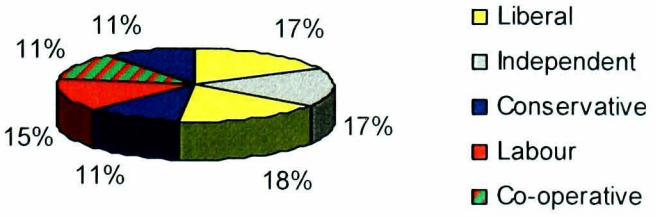


Fig. 181 Longsight

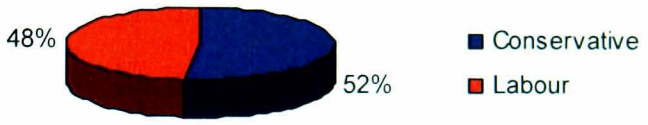
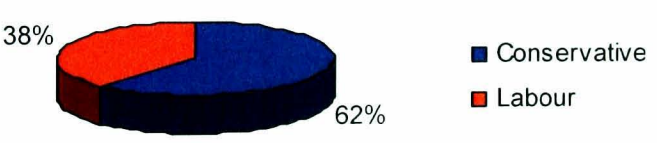


Fig. 182 Medlock Street

Fig. 183 Moss Side East



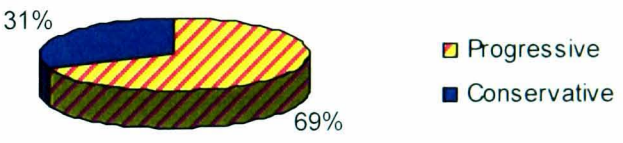


Fig. 184 Moston (Three seats)

Fig. 185 New Cross (Three seats)

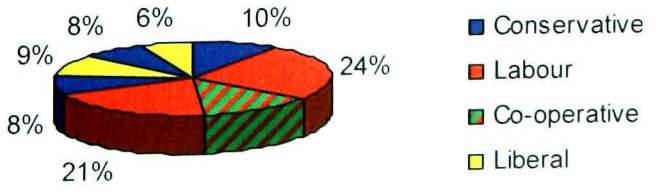


Fig. 186 Newton Heath

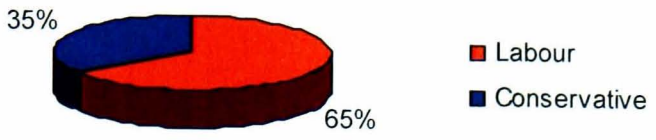


Fig. 187 Oxford

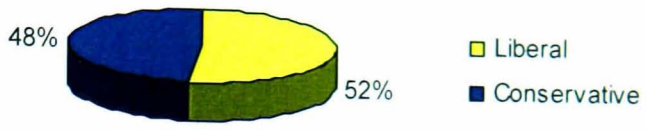


Fig. 188 Rusholme

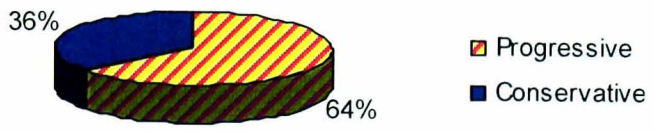


Fig. 189 St. George's

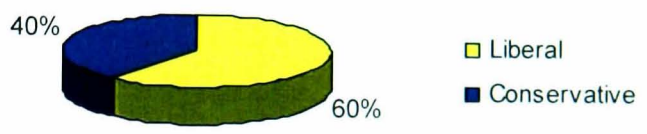


Fig. 190 St. Luke's

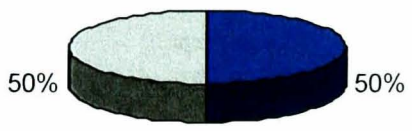


Fig. 191 St. Mark's

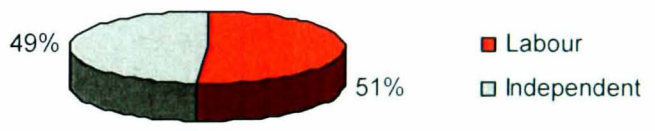
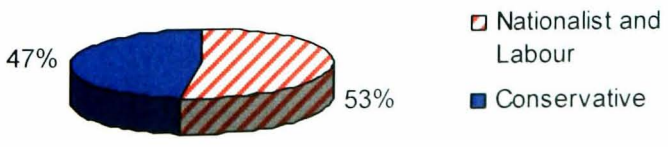


Fig. 192 St. Michael's



1920

Fig. 193 All Saints'

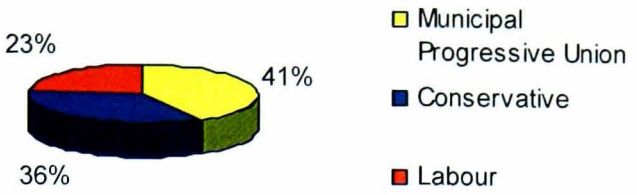


Fig. 194 Ardwick

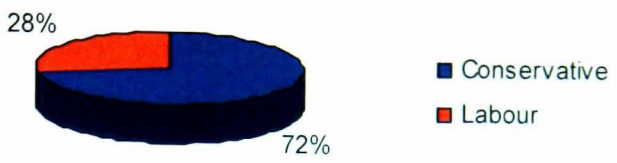


Fig. 195 Beswick

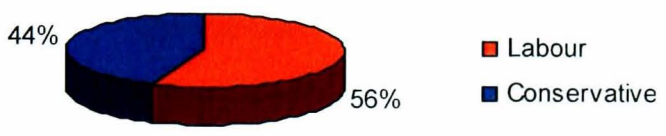


Fig. 196 Blackley

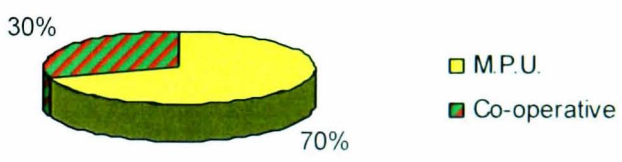


Fig. 197 Cheetham

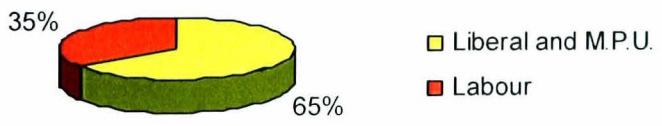


Fig. 198 Collegiate Church

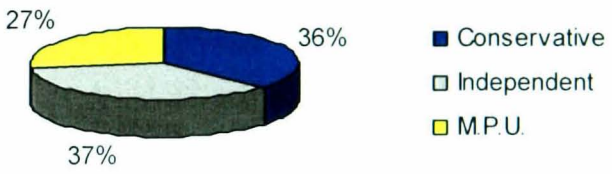


Fig. 199 Collyhurst

Fig. 200 Crumpsall

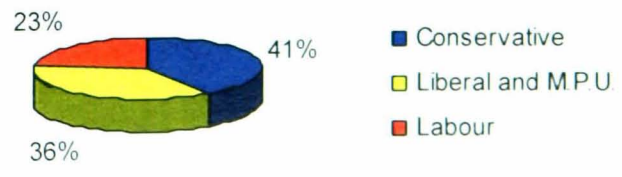


Fig. 201 Didsbury

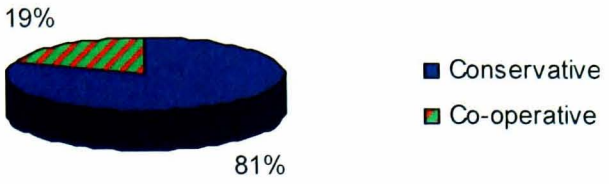


Fig. 202 Exchange

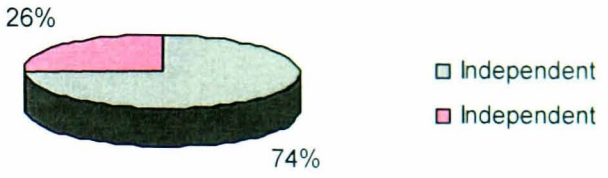


Fig. 203 Gorton South

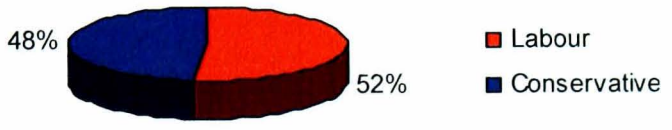


Fig. 204 Harpurhey

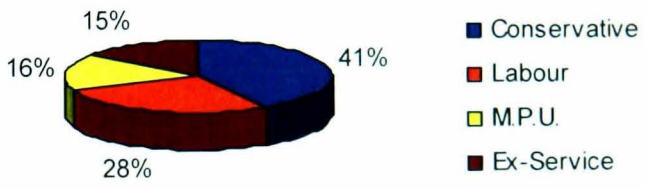


Fig. 205 Levenshulme

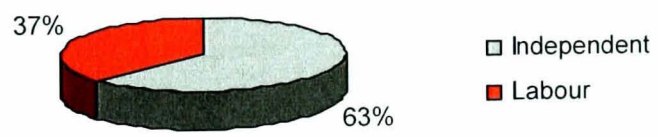


Fig. 206 Longsight

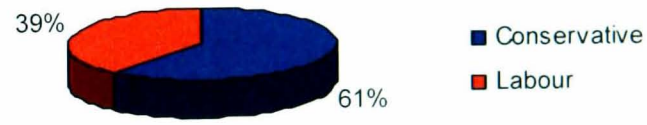


Fig. 207 Medlock Street

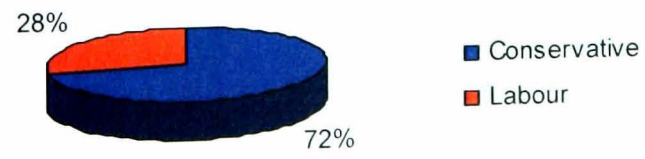


Fig. 208 Miles Platting

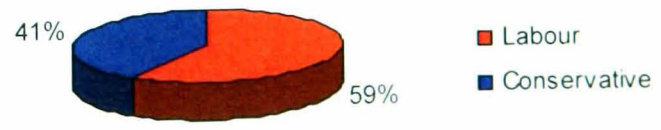


Fig. 209 Moss Side East

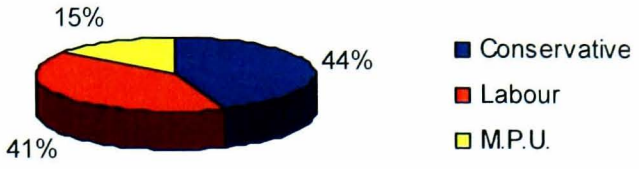


Fig. 210 Moss Side West

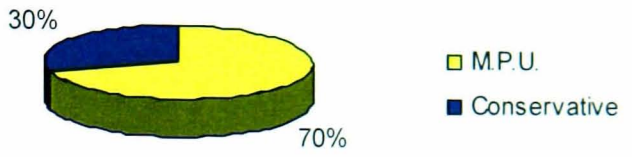


Fig. 211 Moston

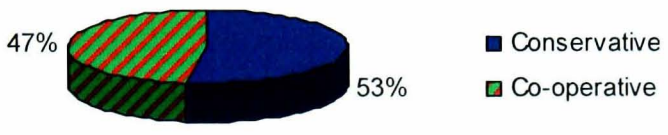


Fig. 212 New Cross

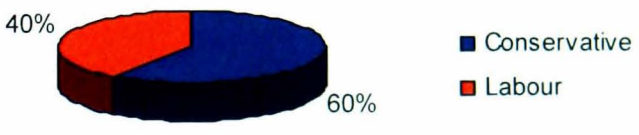


Fig. 213 Newton Heath

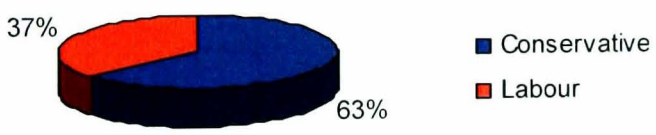


Fig. 214 Openshaw

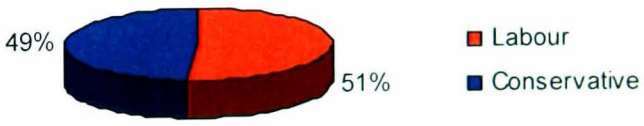


Fig. 215 Oxford

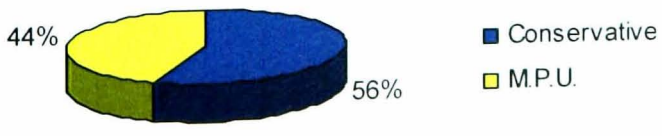


Fig. 216 Rusholme

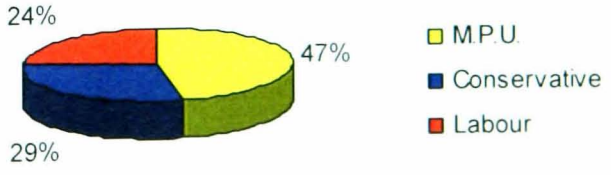


Fig. 217 St. George's

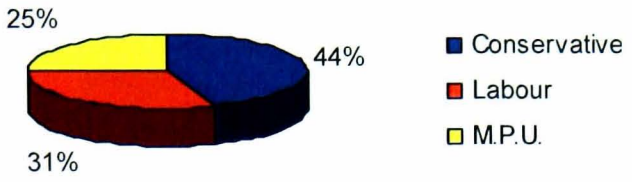


Fig. 218 St. Luke's

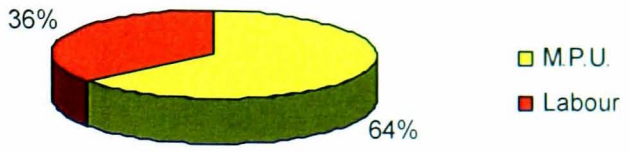


Fig. 219 St. Mark's

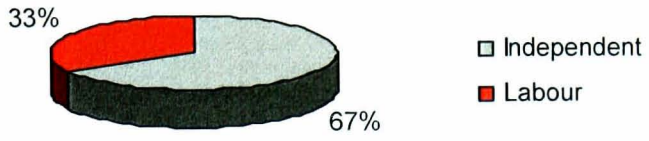


Fig. 220 St. Michael's

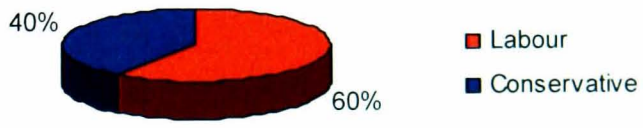


Fig. 221 Withington

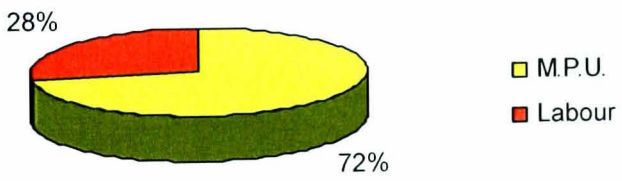


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Fig. 222 All Saints'

Fig. 223 Ardwick

Fig. 224 Beswick

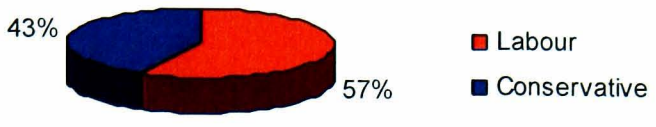

Fig. 225 Blackley

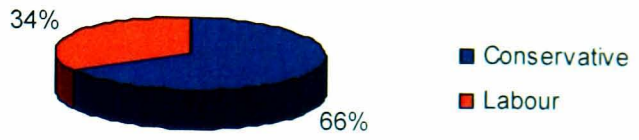

Fig. 226 Bradford

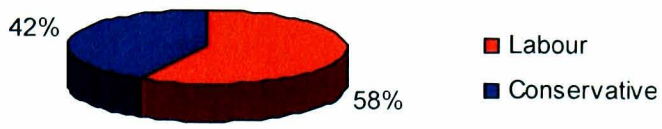

Fig. 227 Cheetham

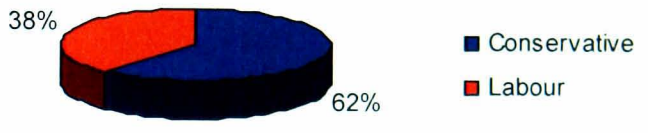

Fig. 228 Chorlton-cum-Hardy

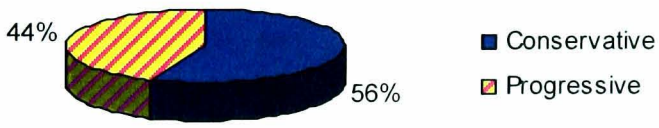

Fig. 229 Collegiate Church

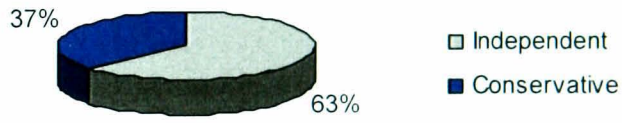

Fig. 230 Collyhurst

Fig. 231 Crumpsall

Fig. 232 Didsbury

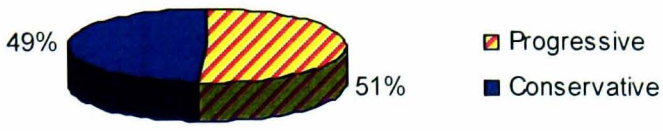

Fig. 233 Exchange

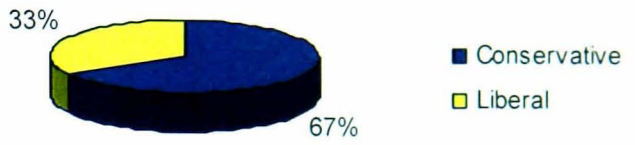

Fig. 234 Gorton North

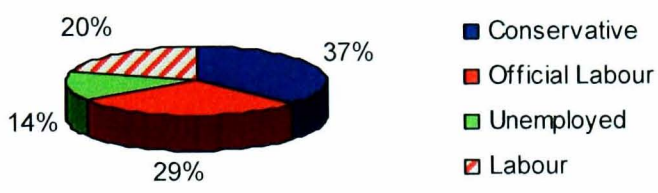

Fig. 235 Gorton South

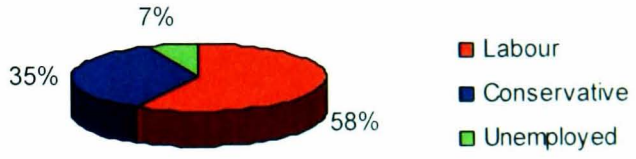

Fig. 236 Harpurhey

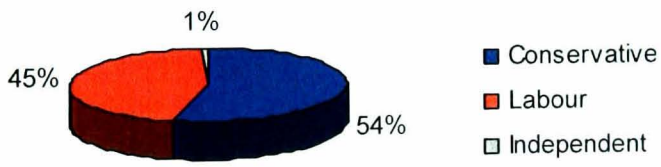

Fig. 237 Levenshulme

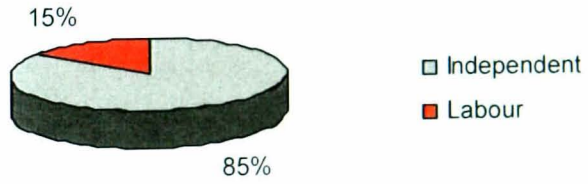

Fig. 238 Longsight

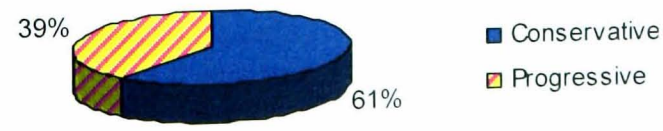

Fig. 239 Medlock Street

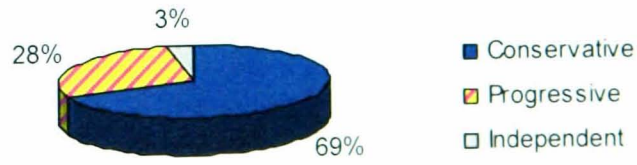

Fig. 240 Miles Platting

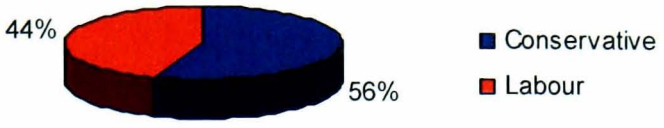

Fig. 241 Moss Side East

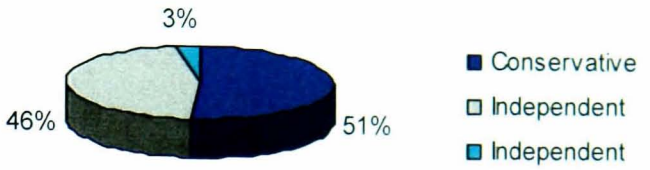

Fig. 242 Moss Side West

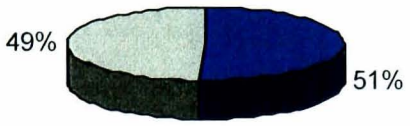

Fig. 243 Moston

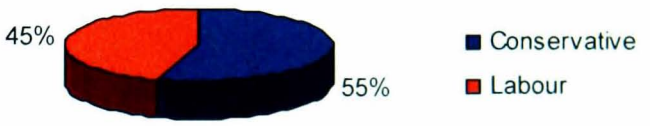

Fig. 244 New Cross

Fig. 245 Newton Heath

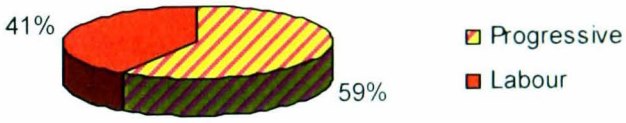

Fig. 246 Openshaw

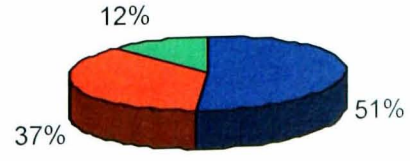

Fig. 247 Rusholme

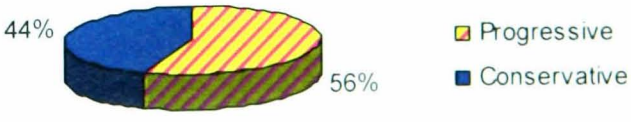

Fig. 248 St. Ann's

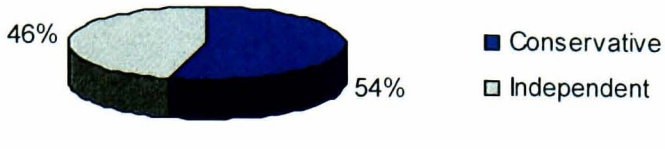

Fig. 249 St. George's

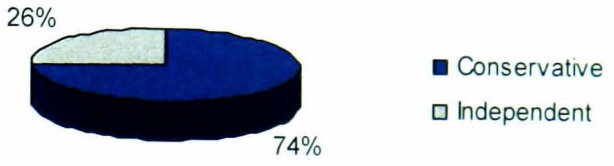

Fig. 250 St. John's

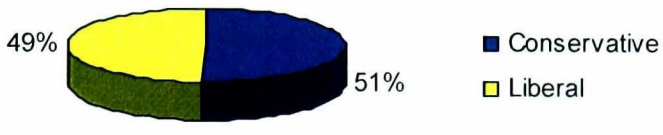

Fig. 251 St. Luke's

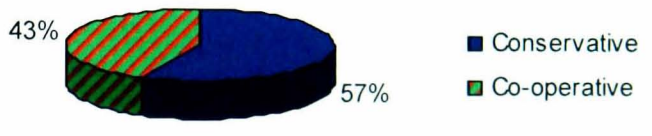

Fig. 252 St. Michael's

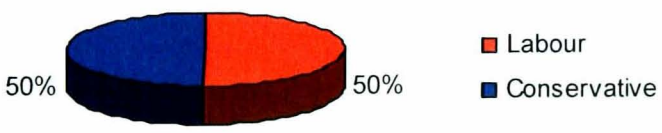

Fig. 253 St. Mark's

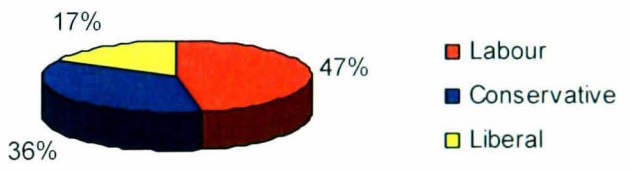

Fig. 254 Withington

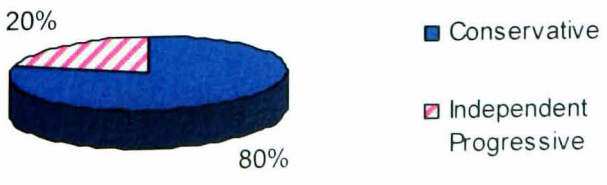

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Fig. 255 All Saints'

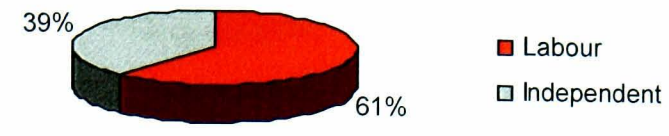


Fig. 256 Ardwick

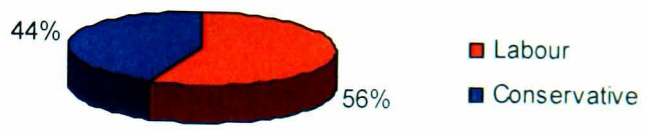


Fig. 257 Beswick

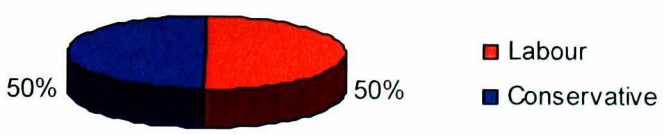


Fig. 258 Bradford

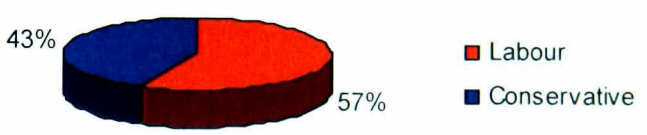


Fig. 259 Chorlton-cum-Hardy

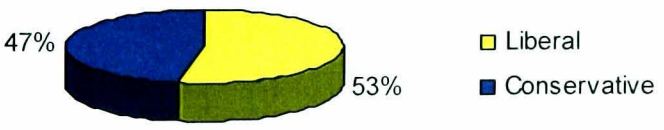


Fig. 260 Collegiate Church

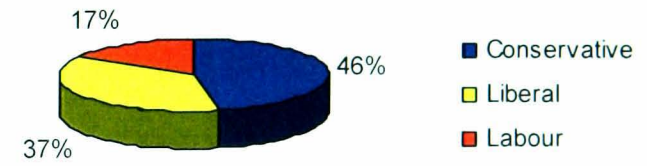
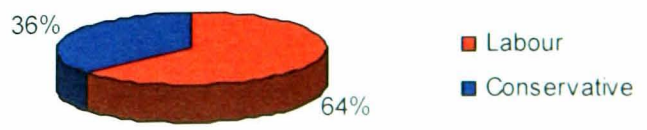


Fig. 261 Collyhurst

Fig. 262 Gorton North



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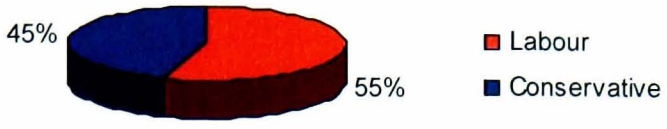


Fig. 264 Harpurhey

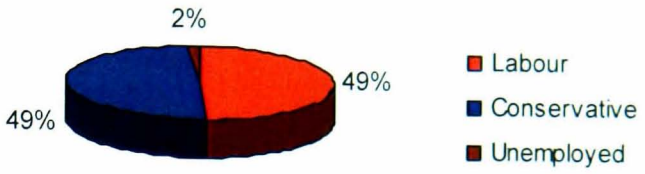


Fig. 265 Miles Platting

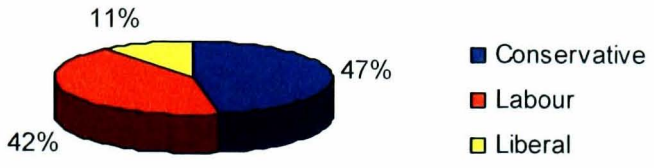


Fig. 266 Moss Side East

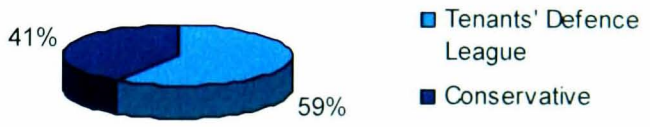


Fig. 267 Moss Side West

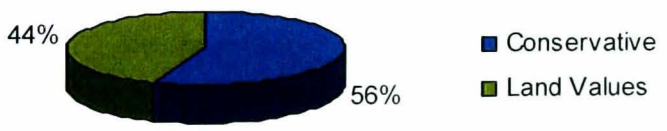


Fig. 268 Moston

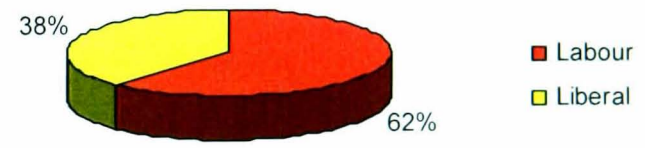


Fig. 269 New Cross

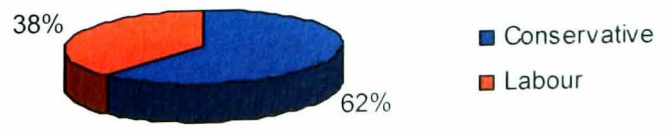


Fig. 270 Newton Heath

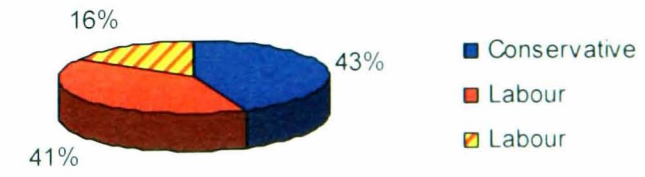


Fig. 271 Openshaw

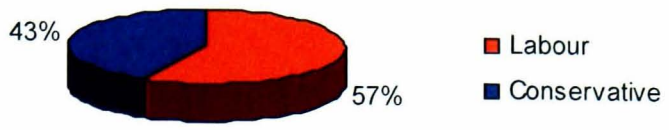


Fig. 272 Rusholme

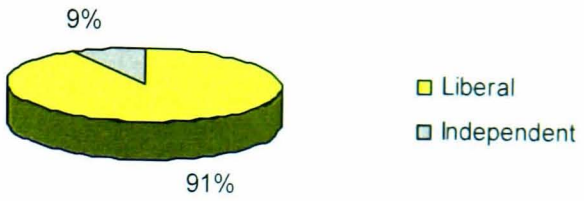


Fig. 273 St. John's

Fig. 274 St. Luke's

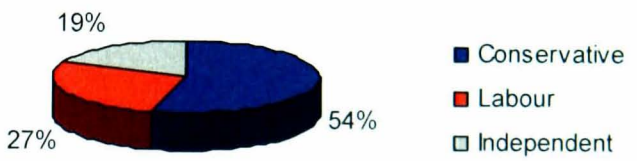
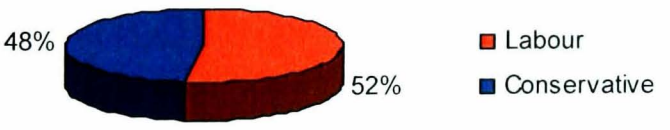


Fig. 275 St. Mark's



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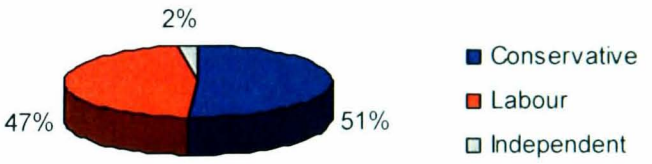
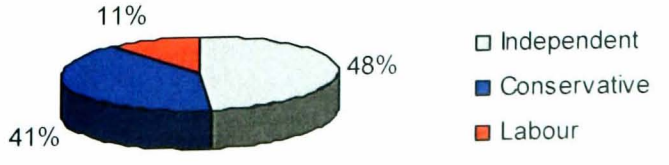


Fig. 277 Withington



Municipal Election Results, Stoke 1919-1922

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Fig. 278 Tunstall no. 1 ward

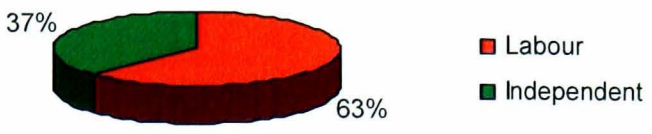


Fig. 279 Tunstall no. 2 ward

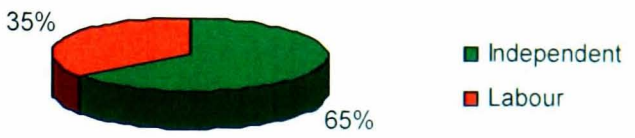


Fig. 280 Tunstall no. 3 ward

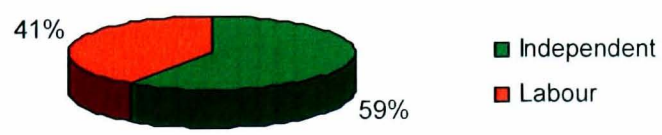


Fig. 281 Hanley no. 9 ward

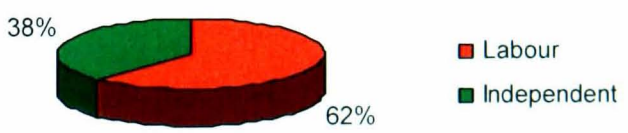


Fig. 282 Hanley no. 10 ward

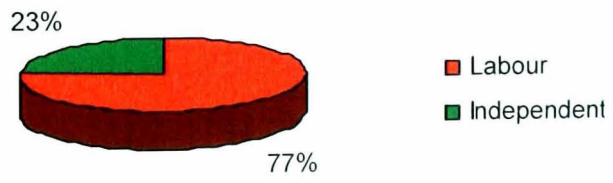


Fig. 283 Hanley no. 11 ward

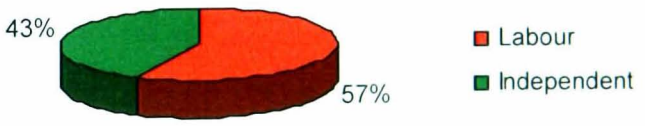
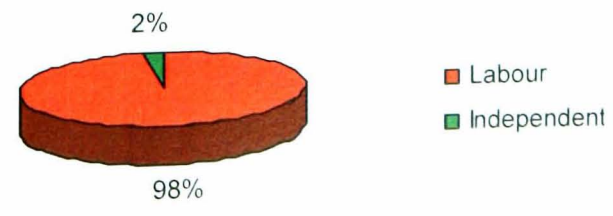


Fig. 284 Hanley no. 12 ward



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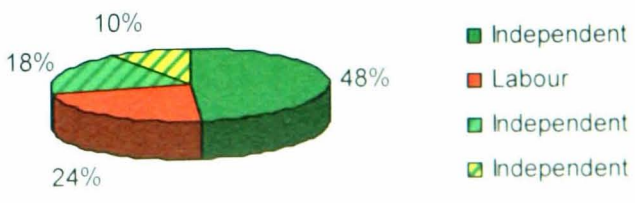

Fig. 286 Hanley no. 14 ward

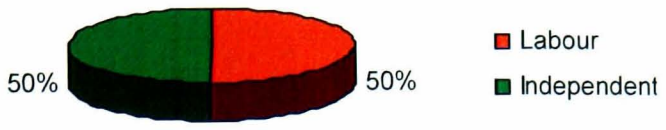

Fig. 287 Hanley no. 15 ward

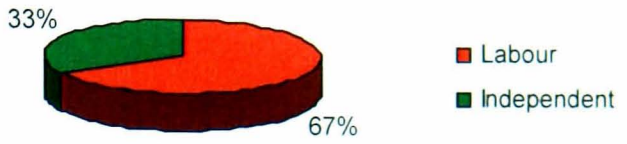

Fig. 288 Fenton no. 19 ward

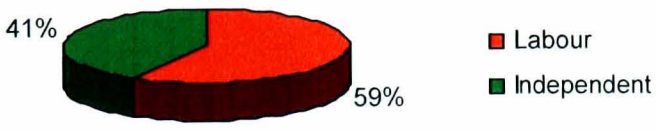

Fig. 289 Fenton no. 22 ward

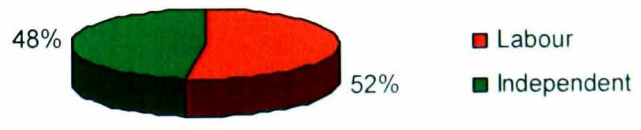

Fig. 290 Longton no. 24 ward

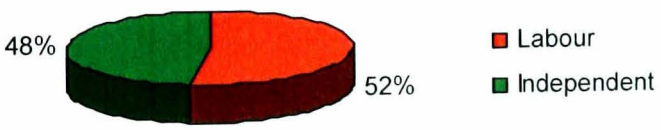

Fig. 291 Burslem no. 4 ward

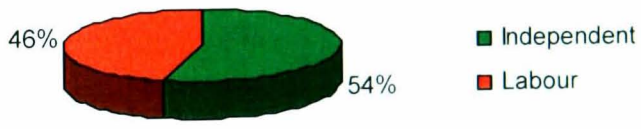

Fig. 292 Burslem no. 5 ward

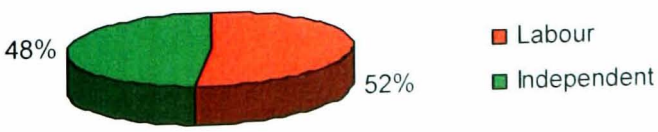

Fig. 293 Burslem no. 6 ward

Fig. 294 Burslem no. 7 ward

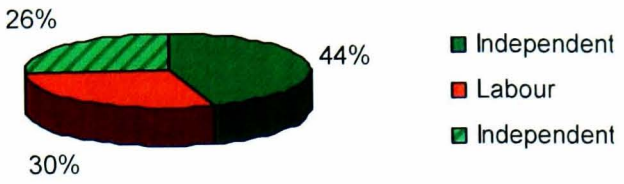

Fig. 295 Burslem no. 8 ward

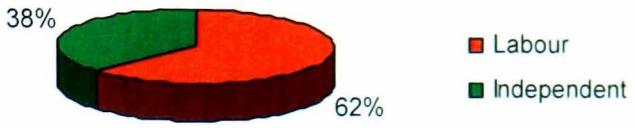

Fig. 296 Stoke no. 17 ward

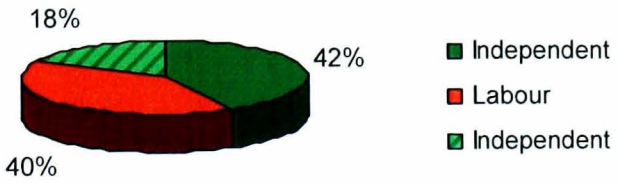

Fig. 297 Stoke no. 18 ward

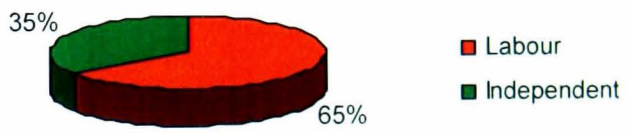

Fig. 298 Stoke no. 21 ward

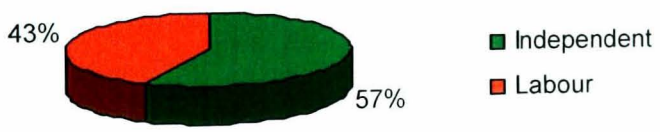

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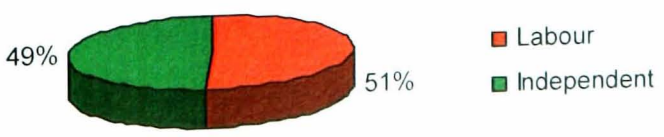
Fig. 299 Tunstall no. 2 ward



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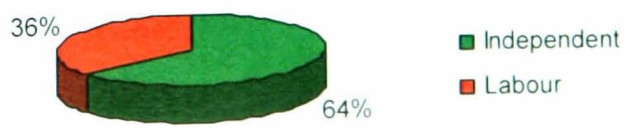


Fig. 301 Burslem no. 5 ward

Fig. 302 Burslem no. 6 ward

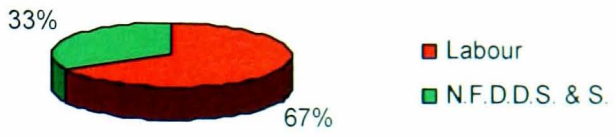


Fig. 303 Hanley no. 9 ward

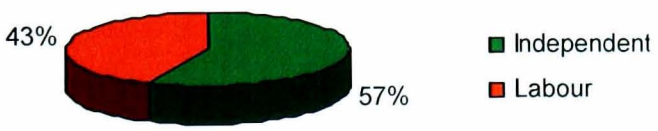


Fig. 304 Hanley no. 10 ward

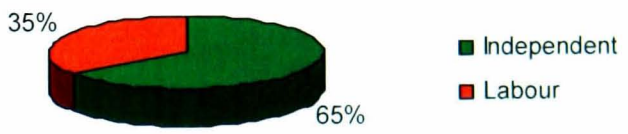


Fig. 305 Hanley no. 11 ward

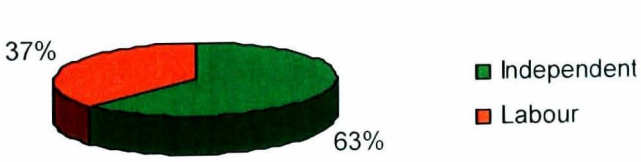


Fig. 306 Hanley no. 12 ward

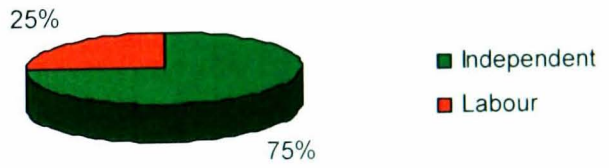


Fig. 307 Hanley no. 15 ward

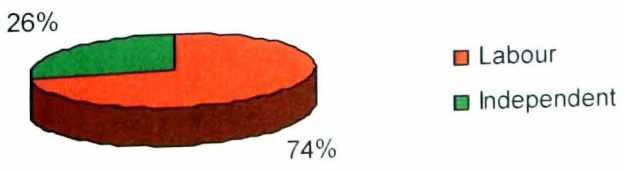


Fig. 308 Stoke no. 17 ward

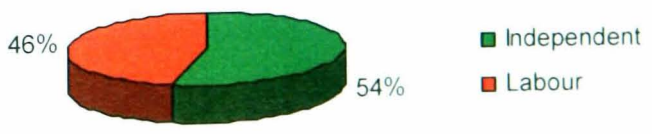


Fig. 309 Stoke no. 18 ward

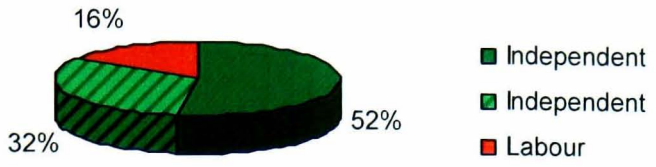


Fig. 310 Stoke no. 21 ward

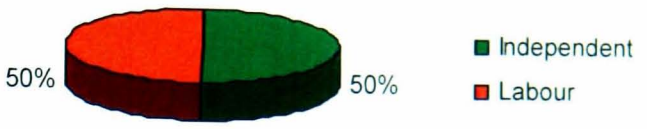


Fig. 311 Fenton no. 19 ward

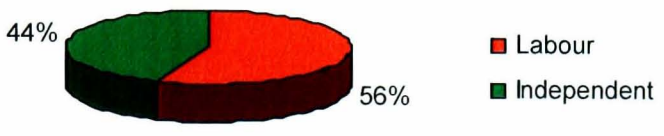


Fig. 312 Fenton no. 20 ward

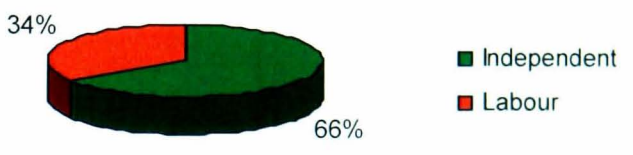


Fig. 313 Fenton no. 22 ward

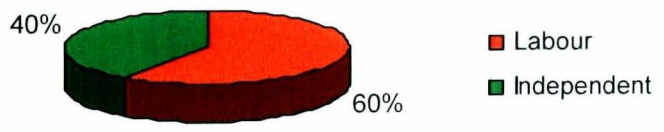
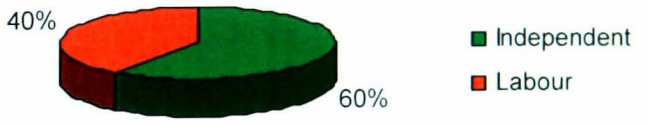
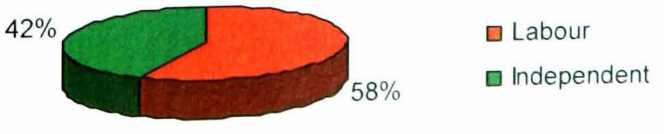


Fig. 314 Longton no. 24 ward



1921

Fig. 315 Tunstall no. 1 ward



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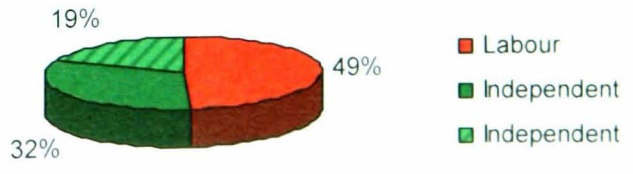

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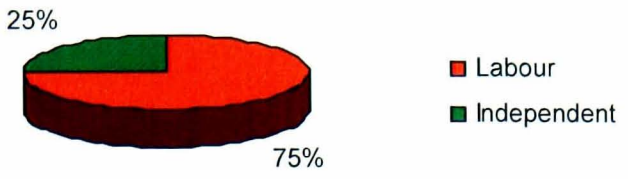

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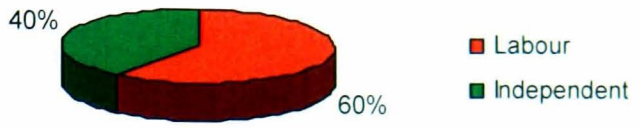

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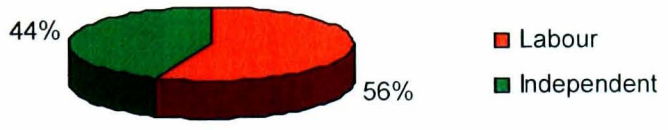

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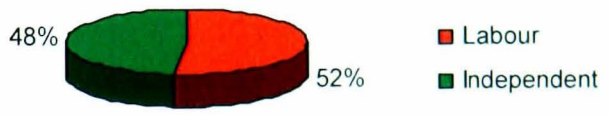

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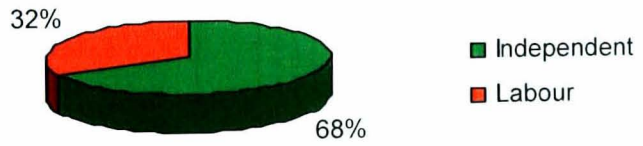

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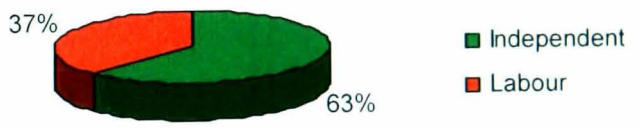

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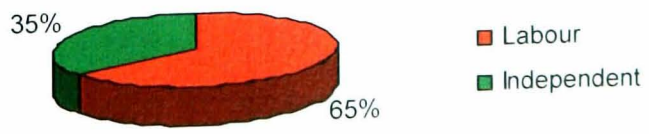
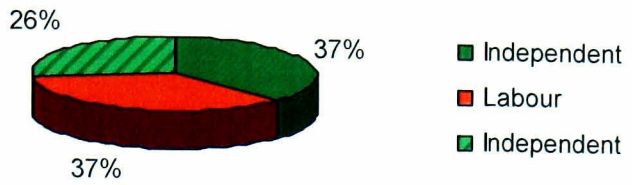


Fig. 324 Fenton no. 19 ward

Fig. 325 Fenton no. 22 ward



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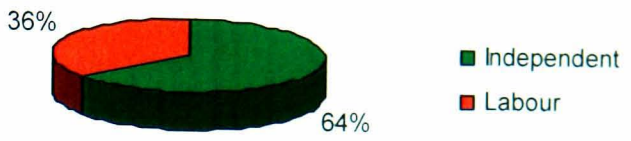

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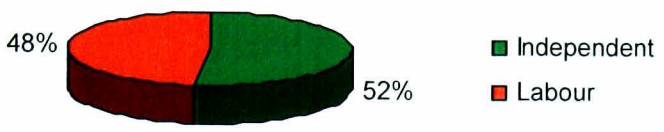
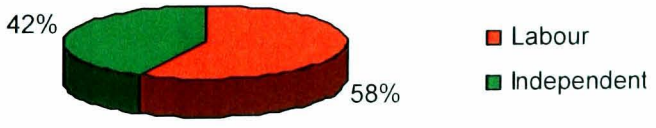


1922

Fig. 328 Tunstall no. 1 ward



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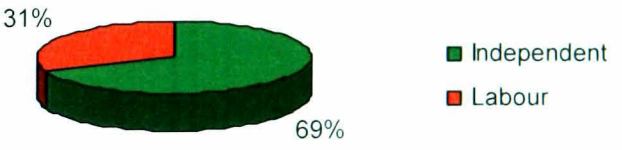

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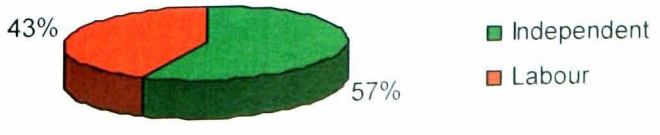

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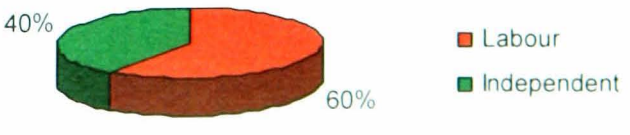

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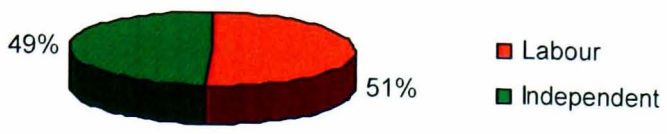

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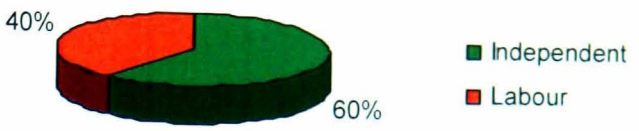

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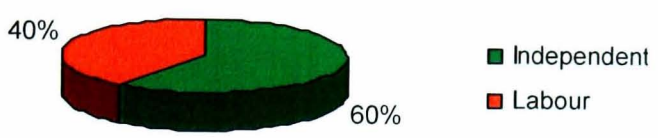

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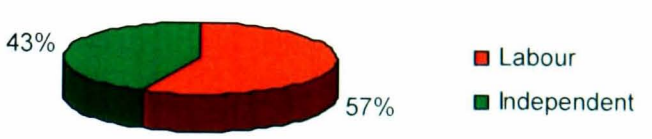

Fig. 336 Political balance of municipal council, Manchester 1906 to 1921

Size of group	1906	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	19	20	21
Liberal	34	32	23	25	27	29	26	27	23	17	6
Labour & Socialist	12	11	8	10	15	16	16	15	30	35	34
Conservative	43	47	54	56	57	55	58	55	52	45	51
Independent	3	3	12	14	6	5	5	8	6	6	7
Progressive									6	6	11
MPU & Liberal MPU										8	8

Fig. 337 Political balance of municipal council, Stoke-on-Trent 1919 to 1922[1]

Size of group	1919	1920	1921	1922
Independent	66	67	63	70
Labour	38	37	41	34

[1] Created in 1910, the (federated) Borough Council of Stoke-on-Trent did not possess a party political complexion

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